WITH THE DYAKS OF BORNEO

CAPTAIN
F·S·BRERETON

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By CAPTAIN BRERETON

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THE PIRATES' STRONGHOLD

With The Dyaks of Borneo

A Tale of the Head Hunters

BY

CAPTAIN F. S. BRERETON

Author of "Kidnapped by Moors" "A Boy of the Dominion" "The Hero of Panama" "Tom Stapleton, the Boy Scout" &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I.

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CHAPTER I

Tyler Richardson

IT was a balmy autumn day four years after Queen Victoria ascended the throne, and the neighbourhood of Southampton Water was looking perhaps more brilliant and more beautiful than it had during the long summer which had just passed. Already the leaves were covering the ground, and away across the water pine-trees stood up like sentinels amidst others which had already lost their covering. A dim blue haze in the distance denoted the presence of Southampton, then as now a thriving seaport town.

Situated on a low eminence within some hundred yards of the sea, and commanding an extended view to either side and in front, was a tiny creeper-clad cottage with gabled roof and twisted chimneys. Behind the little residence there was a square patch of kitchen-garden, in which a grizzled, weather-beaten individual was toiling, whilst in front a long strip of turf, in which were many rose beds, extended as far as the wicket-gate which gave access to the main Portsmouth road.

Seated in the picturesque porch of the cottage, with a long clay pipe between his lips, and a telescope of large dimensions beside him, was a gray-headed gentleman whose dress at once betokened that in his earlier days he had followed the sea as a calling. In spite of his sunken cheeks, and general air of ill-health, no one could have mistaken him for other than a sailor; and if there had been any doubt the clothes he wore would have at once settled the question. But Captain John Richardson, to give him his full title, was proud of the fact that he had at one time belonged to the royal navy, and

took particular pains to demonstrate it to all with whom he came in contact. It was a little vanity for which he might well be excused, and, besides, he was such a genial good-natured man that no one would have thought of blaming him.

On this particular day some question of unusual importance seemed to be absorbing the captain's whole attention. His eyes had a far-away expression, his usually wrinkled brow was puckered in an alarming manner, and the lips, between which rested the stem of his clay pipe, were pursed up in the most thoughtful position. Indeed, so much was he occupied that he forgot even to pull at his smoke, and in consequence the tobacco had grown cold.

"That's the sixth time!" he suddenly exclaimed, with a muttered expression of disgust, awaking suddenly from his reverie. "I've used nearly half the box of matches already, and that is an extravagance which I cannot afford. No, John Richardson, matches are dear to you at least, for you are an unfortunate dog with scarcely enough to live on, and with nothing in your pocket to waste. But I'd forego many little luxuries, and willingly cut down my expenditure, if only I could see a way of settling this beggarly question. For three years and more it has troubled me, and I'm as far now from a solution as I was when the matter first cropped up. There's Frank, my brother at Bristol, who has offered his help, and I fully realize his kindness; but I am sure that his plan will fail to satisfy the boy. That's where the difficulty comes. The lad's so full of spirit, so keen to follow his father's profession, that he would eat his heart out were I to send him to Bristol, but what else can I suggest as a future for him?"

Once more Captain John Richardson became absorbed in thought, and, leaning back against the old oak beam which supported the porch, became lost to his surroundings. So lost indeed that he failed to hear the creak of the wicket, while his dim eye failed to see the youth who came striding

towards him. But a moment later, catching sight of the figure screened amidst the creepers in the porch, the young fellow gave vent to a shout which thoroughly awakened the sailor.

"Sitting in your usual place, Father, and keeping an eye upon every foot of Southampton Water. Why, you are better even than the coast-guard, and must know every ship which sails into or out of the docks."

"Ay, and the port from which she set out or to which she's bound in very many cases," answered the captain with a smile, beckoning to his son to seat himself beside him in the porch. "And talking of ships reminds me, my lad, to broach a certain subject to you. A big overgrown fellow like yourself, with calves and arms which would have been my admiration had I possessed them when I was your age, should be doing something more than merely amusing himself. You've the future to look to, your bread and butter to earn, and how d'you mean to set about it? Come, every young man should have his choice of a calling, though I think that his parent or guardian should be at hand to aid him in his selection. What do you propose to do?"

Captain Richardson once more leaned back against the oaken prop and surveyed his son, while he slowly abstracted a match from a box which he produced from a capacious pocket, and set a light to his pipe once more.

"Come, sonny," he continued, "in a couple of years you will be almost a man, and you are as strong as many already. You were seventeen three months ago, and since that date you have amused yourself without hindrance from me. But your playtime must come to an end. Your father is too poor to keep you longer at school, and has so little money that he can give you nothing but his good wishes towards your future."

For more than a minute there was silence in the porch, while Tyler Richardson stared out across the neat stretch of turf at the dancing water beyond, evidently weighing the words to which the captain had given vent. That he

was strong and sturdy no one could deny. This was no little vanity on the part of his father, but a fact which was apparent to any who glanced at the lad. Seated there with his cap dangling from his fingers, and the sunlight streaming through the creepers on to his figure, one saw a youth whose rounded features bore an unmistakable likeness to those possessed by the captain. But there the resemblance ceased altogether; for Tyler's ruddy cheeks and sparkling eyes betokened an abundance of good health, while his lithe and active limbs, the poise of his head, and the breadth of his shoulders, showed that he was a young man who delighted in plenty of exercise, and to whom idleness was in all probability irksome. Then, too, there was an expression upon his face which told almost as plainly as could words that he was possessed of ambition, and that though he had at present nothing to seriously occupy his attention, yet that, once his vocation was found, he was determined to follow it up with all eagerness.

"I know the matter troubles you, Dad," he said, suddenly turning to his father, "and I know what difficulties there are. Were it not so my answer would be given in a moment, for what was good enough for my father is a fine profession for me. The wish of my life is to enter the royal navy."

"And your father's also. If I saw some way in which I could obtain a commission for you, why, my lad, you should have it to-morrow, but there!" (And the captain held out his palms and shrugged his shoulders to show how helpless he was.) "You know as well as I do that I cannot move a finger to help you in that direction. I must not grumble, but for all that, your father has been an unfortunate dog. I entered the service as full of eagerness as a lad might well be. I was strong and healthy in those days, and the open life appealed to my nature. Then came an unlucky day; a round-shot, fired from one of the French forts which our ships were blockading, struck me on the hip, fracturing the bone badly. You are aware of this. I barely escaped with my life, and for

months remained upon the sick-list. Then, seeing that I was useless upon a ship, the Lords of the Admiralty gave me a shore billet, and for two years I struggled wearily to perform the work. But the old wound crippled me, and was a constant source of trouble, so that in the end I was pensioned off, and retired to this cottage to spend the remainder of my life. I'm a worn-out hulk, Tyler, and that's the truth. Had I remained on the active list I should no doubt have made many friends to whom I could have applied at this moment. Perhaps even were I to state the facts to the Admiralty they would find a commission for you, but then my means are too small to equip you for the life, and you would start so badly that your future might be ruined. But there is Frank, your uncle, who lives at Bristol, and conducts a large trade with foreign parts; we never had much in common, but for all that have always been excellent friends, and on more than one occasion he has suggested that you might go to him and take a post in his warehouse. If that did not suit you, he would apprentice you to one of his ships, and the life for which you long would be before you. There, I have told you everything, and seeing that I cannot obtain a commission for you in the royal navy, I urge upon you to consider your uncle's proposition seriously. Who knows, it may mean a great future. He is childless, and might select you as his successor; and, if not that, he would at least push on your fortunes and interest himself on your behalf."

Once more the old sea-captain leaned back in his seat and groped wearily for his matches, while he fixed a pair of anxious eyes upon his son. As for the latter, he still remained looking steadily out across the water, as if searching for an answer from the numerous vessels which floated there. At last, however, he rose to his feet and replaced the cap upon his head.

"It's a big matter to settle," he said shortly, "and, as you say, I had better consider it thoroughly. I'll give you my answer to-morrow, Father, and I feel sure that I shall do as

you wish. Every day I see the necessity of doing something for my living, and as the navy is out of the question I must accept the next best thing which comes along. I should be an ungrateful beggar if I did not realize the kindness of my uncle's offer, and if I decide to take advantage of it, you may be sure that I shall do my best to please him in every particular. And now I will get off to Southampton, for there is a big ship lying there which I am anxious to see. She's full of grain, and hails from America."

Nodding to the captain, Tyler turned and strolled down the garden. Then, placing one hand lightly upon the gate-post, he vaulted over the wicket and disappeared behind a dense mass of hedge which hid the dusty road from view. A moment or two later his father could hear him as he ran in the direction of Southampton.

Half an hour later Tyler found himself amidst a maze of shipping, with which the harbour was filled, and at once sought out the vessel of which he had spoken. She was a big three-master, and lay moored alongside the dock, with a derrick and shears erected beside her. A couple of gangways led on to her decks, while a notice was slung in the rigging giving warning to all and sundry that strangers were not admitted upon the ship.

A few minutes before Tyler arrived at his destination the stevedores had knocked off work in order to partake of their dinner, whilst the hands on board had retired to their quarters for the same purpose. In fact, but for one of the officers, who strolled backwards and forwards on the dock-side, the deck of the ship was deserted, and Tyler could have gone on board without a soul to oppose him. But he knew the ways of shipping people, for scarcely a day passed without his paying a visit to the harbour. Indeed, so great was his love of the sea that during the last three months he had spent the greater part of his time at the docks, and, being a cheerful, gentle-mannered young fellow, had made many friends amongst the officers and crew of the various vessels which had put in there

with cargoes for the port. Without hesitation, therefore, he accosted the mate, who was strolling up and down upon the quay.

"May I go aboard?" he asked. "I hear that you carry a cargo of grain, and I'm anxious to see how it's loaded."

"Then you've come at the right moment, sir," was the answer. "Step right aboard, and look round as much as you want. We've been terrible hard at work these last two days getting a cargo of cotton ashore, and now we've just hove up the lower hatches, and shall be taking the grain out of her when dinner's finished. It's come all this way for your naval johnnies—at least that's what the boss has given me to understand; and we are expecting a party of officers along any moment to take a look at the stuff. I suppose they'll pass it right away, for it's good right down to the keel. Then these fellows will tackle it with shovels and bags, and you will see they'll hoist it up in a twinkling. Helloo! Blessed if that ain't the party coming along this way!"

He turned, and indicated his meaning by a nod of his head in the direction of three smartly-dressed naval officers who had just put in an appearance.

"The party right enough," he said. "Just excuse me, sir, and get right aboard if you care to."

Having obtained permission to go aboard, Tyler at once stepped to the gangway, and was quickly upon the deck. Then he went to the hatchway, which occupied a large square in the centre of the vessel, and leant over the combing so as to obtain a good view of the scene below. Beneath was a lower deck and a second hatchway of similar dimensions, the covering of which had evidently been recently removed. A glance showed him that the hold was filled with loose grain to within some six feet of the hatchway, and he was occupied in wondering how many sacks of corn had been necessary to fill it, when he was aroused by a voice at his elbow. Turning swiftly, he found the three naval officers and the mate standing beside him.

"A fine cargo, and in splendid condition," the latter was saying. "We've just hove up the hatches for your inspection, and that's the way down."

He pointed to a perpendicular ladder which led from the upper hatch to the one below, and stepped aside to allow the officers to approach it. At the same moment Tyler caught the eye of the elder of the three naval gentlemen, and at once, standing erect, he raised his hand as his father had long since taught him to do.

"Ah, the correct salute, and I thank you for it!" said the officer, acknowledging it swiftly. "Where did you learn it, my lad? I can see that you have been taught by someone who was no landsman."

"My father, Captain Richardson, late of the royal navy, instructed me, sir. He lives close at hand, and would spend his days here upon the docks were it not that he is crippled and cannot get about."

"By a gunshot wound—obtained in warfare?" asked the officer with interest.

"Yes, sir. He was struck by a round-shot fired from a French fort, and was pensioned from the service."

"That is sad, very unfortunate," said the officer; "but his son must take his place, and repay the wound with interest when we have war with France again. But I must see to this cargo. This is one of the many duties which we sailors have to perform. At one time sailing a three-master, and then conning one of the new steam-vessels which have been added to our fleets. Another day we muster ashore, and then an officer can never say what he may find before him. He may have to visit the hospitals, the barracks, or inspect a delivery of hammocks before it is divided amongst the men. To-day we are here to see this cargo of grain, and to pass it if in good condition."

"Which it is, right away down to the keel, you guess!" burst in the American mate. "Say, sir, there's the ladder, and if you'll excuse me, the sooner the inspection's done

with the sooner we'll clear the hold and get away out to sea."

"Then oblige me by slipping down, Mr. Maxwell, and you too, Mr. Troutbeck. Take one of those wooden spades with you, and turn the grain over in every direction. Be careful to see that it is not mildewed or affected by the damp. You can bring a specimen on deck for my benefit."

Hastily saluting, the two officers who had been addressed sprang towards the steep gangway which led below, and swarmed down it with an agility which was commendable. Then they paused for a moment or two upon the edge of the lower hatch until a wooden spade had been tossed to them, when they leapt upon the glistening mass of grain which filled the hold. Meanwhile Tyler and the officer who had remained above stood leaning over the upper hatch, looking down upon the figures below. Indeed, the former was fascinated, for the sight of a naval uniform filled him with delight, while to be able to watch officers at their work was a treat which he would not have missed for anything. It was queer to see the way in which the younger of the two juniors tossed his cane aside with a merry laugh and commenced to delve with the spade; and still more quaint to watch the second as he thrust his two hands into the corn, and, having withdrawn them filled to the brim, walked towards the edge of the hatch with the intention of spreading the grains there the better to inspect them. But—that was stranger still, for, missing his footing, the officer gave a violent swerve, and with difficulty saved himself from tumbling full length. The sight, the exclamation of astonishment and disgust, brought a smile to Tyler's lips; but a second later his expression changed to one of amazement. Why, the officer had again all but lost his footing, and—yes, as Tyler stared down at him, he staggered to one side, threw one hand up to his face, and then collapsed in a heap, where he lay with hands and toes half-buried in the corn. Almost at the same moment his companion, who had been digging vigorously, let his spade drop from his

fingers, and looked about him as if dazed. Then he struggled towards his comrade with a low cry of alarm, only to stumble himself and come crashing into the grain.

"There's something wrong down there!" shouted Tyler, realizing that some terrible misfortune had suddenly and unexpectedly overtaken the naval officers. "Look, sir, they are on their faces, and appear to be insensible!"

He tugged at the sleeve of the senior officer without ceremony, and directed his attention to those below, for the former had been engaged in conversation with the mate, and had not witnessed what had happened.

"Something wrong!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Why, what could be wrong? Ahoy, there, Troutbeck and Maxwell! Why, they are on their faces, and, as I live, they are insensible!"

His amazement was so great that he stood there dumbfounded, and stared at Tyler as though he could not believe his eyes. But a shout of alarm from the mate quickly aroused him.

"It's the gas!" he cried in shrill anxious tones. "Quick, or they'll be suffocated! Hi, for'ard there! All hands on deck to the rescue!

He went racing towards the quarters in which the men were enjoying their meal, leaving Tyler and the naval officer alone. As for the latter, his astonishment was still so great that he remained rooted to the spot, leaning over the hatchway, the combing of which he grasped with both hands, whilst he stared down at the two prostrate figures huddled below upon the corn as though the sight was too much for him. Then he suddenly stood erect and screwed his knuckles into his eyes, as though he feared that they were misleading him.

"Gas!" he murmured doubtfully. "What gas? How could there be such a thing down there?" Then, suddenly recollecting the condition of his juniors, and realizing that they were in the gravest danger, he sprang towards the ladder which led

to the hold below, and commenced to descend it as rapidly as possible.

But Tyler was before him, for though dumbfounded at first at what was beyond his comprehension, the shout to which the mate had given vent had instantly caused him to understand the danger of the situation. There was gas in the hold, some poisonous vapour unseen by those who entered through the hatchway, but lying there floating over the corn ready to attack any who might enter into the trap. What should he do? The question flashed through his mind like lightning, and as quickly the answer came.

"We must get them out of it," he shouted hoarsely, "and by the quickest way too. Hi, there, get hold of the winch and lower away!"

As in the case of the officer who had stood beside him, his first thought had been to rush for the ladder, and to descend to the hatch below by that means. But a quick glance at the figures lying half-buried in the corn, and an instant's reflection, told him that rescue would be difficult, if not impossible, in that way. For, supposing he leapt from the lowest rung on to the cargo of grain, could he hope to be able to lift one of the victims and carry him up the steep ladder which led to safety? Such an attempt would require more than double the strength which he possessed, and besides there was the deadly gas to be reckoned with. Like a flash the thoughts swept through his brain, for Tyler was a sharp young fellow, and ere another moment had passed his plan for rescue was formed. Pointing to the winch, from which a stout rope ran through a block attached to the boom above, and from thence dangled down into the hold, he called to the mate, who now came running along the deck with three of the hands, to get hold of the levers and prepare to work upon them. Then, tearing his handkerchief from his pocket, he hastily tied it round his face, fastening the knot behind his head as tightly as possible, so that the thickest folds came across his mouth and nostrils. A moment later he had grasped the rope which

hung at one side of the hatchway, and at once passed it around his waist. A rapid hitch which his father had taught him secured it there, and a moment later he had thrust himself over the hatchway and was swinging in mid-air.

"Lower away!" he shouted, "and when you see me pass the loop round one of them, hoist as fast as you can. Now, let her go!"

Grasping the length of rope which dangled beneath him, and which he had been careful to leave, he tied it into a strong loop as the men above lowered him into the hold. Then, holding it in both hands, he awaited the moment when he should alight upon the corn. Ah! He was there, and his feet were already sunk ankle-deep in the cargo. Then he became aware of the fact that, though perfectly clear, the atmosphere was stifling. He felt as though he were choking, for in spite of the thick handkerchief about his face the biting gas seemed to fly into his lungs, and at once set him coughing violently. But, determined not to be beaten, he overcame the spasm, and, carefully holding his breath, moved towards one of the prostrate figures.

It was no easy matter to pass the loop around the helpless man, but Tyler worked vigorously at the task. Placing the coil of rope upon the corn close to the feet of one of the officers, he held it there with one toe, and at once grasped the man by the ankles. A lusty heave brought him sliding along through the grain, and scarcely three seconds had passed before the loop was about his body and securely fastened beneath his arms.

"Hoist!" he endeavoured to shout, but his muffled face and the choking gas deadened the words. But for all that, his wishes were clear to those above, who stood staring over the hatchway, for Tyler stood erect and waved eagerly to them. There was a shout, the rope tautened, and then at first slowly, and afterwards with a rush which showed that willing hands were at the winch, Tyler and the officer for whose rescue he had so gallantly descended were hoisted out

of the hold. With a swing the boom was brought towards the side, a couple of men rushed at the dangling figures, and ere the naval officer who witnessed the scene had time to give the hoarse command, "Lower away!" the two were lying upon the deck, while the mate of the freight-ship was eagerly removing the loop from the figure of the unconscious officer. As for Tyler, he sat for a short space as if dazed, while he gasped and struggled for his breath. But the knowledge that one victim still remained below, that a second life was at stake, roused him to energy. With a shiver which he could not suppress in spite of every effort, he struggled to his feet and dashed at the hatchway.

"Lower again!" he managed to call out between the paroxysms of coughing which shook him. "Now, let go!"

There was no doubt that the real danger, the urgency of the situation, was impressed upon all who were helping in the rescue; and it did not need the frantic gestures and husky words of command of the elderly naval officer to stimulate the hands to rapid action. By now, too, some fifteen men had assembled, and while a few promptly carried the unconscious officer aside, and set about to restore his animation, the remainder at once leapt to the winch, and set the handles whirling round at such a pace that the rope and its burden were swiftly at their destination. At the same instant the American mate swung himself on to the ladder and went swarming down till he reached the deck below, where he remained ready to lend assistance should he be called for. And well was it that he did so, for that stifling gas well-nigh overcame Tyler in his work of rescue. Holding his breath as he had done before, the latter dashed towards the second prostrate figure once he had obtained a foothold. Then, following the same tactics, he placed the loop in position and grasped the man by his ankles.

"Heave! Pull ho!" As if the words would help the gallant young fellow below, the anxious watchers above gave vent to them, their shouts increasing almost to shrieks of encourage-

ment in their eagerness. "Heave! He's almost through. Once more, and you will have him in position. Ah! he's down!"

A feeling of consternation and dismay suddenly silenced the voices, and a crowd of eager, anxious faces hung over the hatchway, while a couple of volunteers sprang at the ladder.

"Stand aside!" shouted one of them huskily, a big, raw-boned American sailor. "The lad's down, and we're not the boys to stand here looking on and see him die. Say, maties, pitch me the end of the rope, and I'll go in for him!"

Swiftly descending the ladder, he had almost reached the deck below, and was looking eagerly about him for the expected rope, when another voice reached the ears of the onlookers.

"Easy there! I'm nearest the spot, and I'll pull them out, whatever the cost. Jim Bowman, you can make a turn about your body with the rope, and stand ready if there's need. I'm for it right away as I am."

Stuffing a bulky red handkerchief between his teeth, the mate glanced swiftly at his comrade to see that the words were fully understood. Then with a bound he leapt over the low combing of the hatchway, and alighted on the piled-up corn.

"He'll do it! He's the right man to tackle the business! Stand ready, boys!"

Those above stared down at the scene below with eyes which threatened to burst from their sockets, so great was each one's eagerness. And all the while, as the plucky mate tugged at the prostrate figure of the officer, they sent hoarse shouts echoing down into the hold. Breathlessly they watched as the loop slipped upwards till it encircled the body, and then a dozen lusty individuals rushed towards the winch, ready to lend a hand should those already stationed there prove too weak for the task.

"Hoist!" The big American, who stood on the lower deck,

bellowed the command so loudly that it was heard far away along the dock. "Hoist smartly, boys!"

Round went the winch, but on this occasion less swiftly than before, for the load to be dragged from the hold was heavier! But still the handles flew round rapidly, and within a short space of time Tyler, the officer, and the American mate lay in a heap upon the deck, where they were instantly pounced upon by those who had helped in the rescue.

CHAPTER II

Eastward Ho!

"HOW'S that, my lad? There, open your eyes and look about you, and then take a sip at this glass."

Tyler felt a strong arm about his shoulders, and a hard rim of something cold against his teeth. Then a few drops of water flowed into his mouth, and instantly he was awake, though only half conscious of his surroundings.

"Eh," he murmured, "what's the matter? Time to get up? Oh!"

He gave vent to a little cry of pain as he suddenly became aware of the fact that a red-hot band seemed to encircle his waist. Then he quickly realized the cause, and sat up with a start, remembering that he had placed a coil of rope about him, and that the loop to which the officer was hung must have pulled strongly upon him.

"Feeling sore, my lad?" was asked in tones which seemed familiar. "The rope had hitched as tight as a hangman's noose, and we had to cut it adrift before we could free you. No wonder you have pain, for I expect that your sides and chest are badly chafed. But you're alive, thank God! And have come to at last. Gracious! What a fright you have given us all! But come, see if you cannot stand on your feet and walk about, for it will do you all the good in the world."

"Stand! Rather! I should think I could!" responded Tyler eagerly, suddenly becoming aware of the fact that the elderly naval officer supported him. "Thank you, sir! I'll get up at once."

"Then heave, and there you are."

Placing his hand beneath Tyler's arms, the officer helped him to rise to his feet, and then, fearful lest he should be giddy and fall, stood beside him holding him by the coat.

"Feel steady?" he asked. "A bit shaky, I've no doubt, but another sip and a little water on your head will put you right. Here, one of you lads give a hand and we'll take him to the nearest pump."

There was a group of sailors standing around watching Tyler with interested eyes, and instantly a number sprang forward to support him. Then with faltering steps, and gait which would have caused him to reel from side to side had it not been for their help, they led him across the dock to a shed some little distance away. A pump was erected beside it, and before many seconds had passed a stream of ice-cold water was gushing from the spout into the trough below.

"Now, off with his coat and shirt, and one of you boys hop right along to fetch him a towel," cried the big American, who happened to form one of the party. "Slick's the word, my lad, and back with it smartly. Here, stand right aside, and let me hold on to the youngster."

A big, muscular arm was put around Tyler's tottering figure, and he was deftly placed in such a position as would enable the water to flow upon his head and shoulders. Gush! It came surging from the pump at the handle of which one of the men worked vigorously, and in a little while Tyler was glad to withdraw with dripping head and face, gasping for breath with almost as much energy as had been the case after his first ascent from the hold. Then a towel was thrown over his shoulders, and willing hands set to work to dry him.

"Feel more like yourself, eh? Just bring along that comb, sonny, and we'll fix him up, proper," said the American. "Now, on with your shirt and coat, and where's the boy that's holding on to his cap?"

Their friendly attentions almost bewildered Tyler, for he was unused to them, and, in fact, at another time would have blushed for shame at finding himself treated so much like

a child. But in spite of the cold douche to his head he still felt dizzy. His brain swam with the effects of the choking gas, which had been given off by the cargo of corn, while huge black spots seemed to float dreamily about in the air and disturbed his vision. Then, too, though he manfully endeavoured to keep his figure erect, his legs would tremble in spite of himself, while his knees shook and knocked together in a manner which threatened to bring him headlong to the ground.

"I'm a baby!" he managed to gasp in tones of vexation. "Just fancy a fellow of my age not being able to stand up alone!"

The thought distressed him so greatly that once again he made a futile effort to remain on his feet, only to find himself in much the same helpless condition. Then a biscuit-box was placed beneath him, and he sat down with a feeling of relief.

"Baby! No sich thing, let me tell you, sir!" exclaimed the big American indignantly. "You're just shook up, and that's the truth of it, for I reckon that that 'ere gas wur strong enough to upset a Red Injun, and much more a chap of your constitootion. Jest you sit tight and hold on to your tongue while we pour a few drops of this stuff down yer throat. Baby! Ho!"

With a shake of his head the big sailor turned to one of his comrades and took from him a cracked glass containing a dark and evil-smelling liquid.

"Up with your chin," he said, placing the glass to Tyler's lips. "Now, down with this at a gulp."

Obedient to the order, Tyler opened his mouth and swallowed the draught. Then he shivered again, for the spirit was strong and pungent. But in spite of its nasty flavour, and of the uncomfortable sense of burning which it left in his throat, he was bound to confess that the draught did wonders for him. Indeed, scarcely five minutes were gone before strength came back to his legs, while his brain and eyes seemed to have cleared wonderfully. A pat on the back from the big hand of

the American encouraged him to stand again, and with a gay laugh he found himself on his feet.

"That's better!" he exclaimed in cheery tones. "What's become of the officers?"

"I reckon they're jest like you, a trifle shook up and put out, don't yer know," was the answer. "Yer must understand, young fellah, that chaps can't go right down into a hold what's full of that gas without feeling mighty bad. You've all had a near squeak for yer lives, I reckon, and ef it hadn't er been for you, young shaver, them two officers would have been awaiting their funeral right now. I tell yer, me and the other covies is jest hoping to make yer acquaintance. We'd be proud to get hold of yer fingers, and, Jehoshaphat! as soon as you're well we hope to do it. Now, will yer come aboard and take a sleep in one of our bunks, to drive the muddle out of yer head, or will yer go slick away home? Jest say the word, and we'll help you, whatever's the case."

"One moment, please. I desire to speak to this young gentleman," called someone from outside the circle, and as the sailors sprang aside the naval officer who had already befriended Tyler entered the circle and grasped the latter warmly by the hand.

"You are more yourself now," he said with a friendly smile, "and I can therefore speak to you as I would have done half an hour ago had you been in a fit condition to listen to me. On behalf of the two young officers, whose lives you so gallantly saved, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. The deed was a noble one, for, seeing their insensible figures lying in that poisonous hold below, you, like everyone else, must have realized instantly the great risk to be incurred by attempting their rescue. The warning which the mate gave told you that gas lay below the hatchway, and that it had been the cause of striking down my officers. In spite of that you rushed to help them, and I must admit that the promptness of your action, the remarkable rapidity with which you took in the situation and formed your plans, filled me with

amazement. To be candid, I myself was so dumbfounded and taken aback that I stood there helpless. But then, you see, I am no longer a young man, and have lost that keenness with which the junior members of my service are invariably filled.

"Now that I come to look into the facts carefully it is a matter of surprise to me that you did not rush to the ladder the instant you realized the necessity for action. But how could you possibly have rescued either of those unfortunate fellows by that means? Obviously two men at least would have been required for the task. You saw that, and at once decided upon an easier and more effective plan. No one could have made his preparations more completely or more rapidly. Your loops were made in a sailor-like manner which does credit to your father's teaching. For the rest, I am too full of gratitude to you to say much at this moment. Your courage and resolution have delighted me and I congratulate you most heartily."

Placing one hand upon Tyler's shoulder the officer grasped his fingers eagerly with the other, and squeezed them in a manner which showed better than words how much his feelings were aroused. Indeed he might have remained there for many minutes, patting Tyler gently upon the back meanwhile, had it not been for the enthusiastic sailors who stood around, and who had without exception pressed eagerly forward to hear what he had to say. Seeing his final action, however, at once reminded them of their own decision, expressed by their burly comrade, who once more came to the front.

"You'll excuse us, Admiral," he said with a slouching salute, "but like you we're firm set on shaking. Say, young fellow, we're proud to know yer."

Unabashed by the presence of an officer of such seniority in the navy, they crowded forward, and each in turn grasped the blushing Tyler by the hand. Then, as if that had been insufficient to satisfy them, they tossed their caps high in the air, and gave him three rousing cheers.

"There," said the officer, lifting his hands as soon as the shout had died down, "like myself you have shown your appreciation; and now, if you will leave this young gentleman to me, I will see that he is taken home. Come," he continued, turning to Tyler with a smile, "you are still shaken and feel the effects of that poisonous gas. It will be as well if you return to your father, and rest for the remainder of the day. Hail a conveyance, my lads, and tell the man to drive right on to the dock, for we must not allow this young man to walk too much at present. Yes, those are the doctor's orders, and I am here to see that they are strictly enforced," he went on, as Tyler directed an appealing glance towards him. "Fortunately for you and my two officers, one of our ship's surgeons happened to be passing as you were hauled up from the hold, and he was able to attend to you at once. Seeing that you were coming round he left you in my hands and devoted all his care to the others, who were in a very grave condition. They, too, I am thankful to say, have regained consciousness, so that I no longer feel anxiety on their behalf. Permit me, young gentleman, here is the conveyance."

Taking Tyler by the arm, he led him to a fly which had just driven up, and having ushered him in, took the remaining vacant seat himself.

"Drive to Captain John Richardson's," he called out, and then resumed his conversation with Tyler, telling him as they went that the mate of the American ship, who had pluckily helped in the rescue, had suffered no ill effects. Half an hour later, much to the astonishment of the captain, who still sat in his porch keeping watch upon the long strip of water which ebbed before his cottage, a conveyance came rolling along the main Portsmouth road, and halted just opposite the wicket which gave access to his garden. At once his spy-glass went to his eyes, for he was somewhat short-sighted, and his amazement was profound when he discovered Tyler walking towards him, looking pale and shaky, and arm in arm with a gray-

headed naval officer. Had it not been for his shattered hip he would have risen to his feet to greet the new-comer, for naval officers seldom or never came his way. As he had said when speaking to his son, he was a poor old hulk, doomed to live in that out-of-the-way spot, forgotten or unknown by men who might have been his comrades had ill-luck not assailed him. In his excitement, the clay pipe and box of matches went tumbling to the ground, where the former smashed into a hundred pieces. Then the old instincts of discipline came back to him and he lifted his hand to his cap with all the smartness he could command.

It was fine to see the way in which this stranger approached the captain. Halting there for one moment, and drawing himself stiffly erect, he returned the salute swiftly. Then he sprang forward and greeted the old sailor effusively.

"Proud to meet you, Captain Richardson!" he exclaimed. "Delighted to make your acquaintance, and to know the father of this gallant young fellow. But, surely we have met before? Richardson? Tell me, sir, when did you enter the service?"

"Forty years ago the fifth of November next. Midshipman aboard the flag-ship *Victory*, bound from Portsmouth for the Mediterranean. And you?"

"An old ship-mate of yours or I much mistake?" exclaimed the officer with eagerness. "Don't you remember Davies—Tom Davies, of the *Victory*—my first commission too. Why, of course you do. A year after I joined I was drafted into another ship, and so we were separated, and have remained so until this moment."

"And I remained aboard for five solid years," burst in the captain enthusiastically, his face all aglow at the recollection of his earlier days. "Then I was transferred to the *Bellerophon*, and again to another ship. We cruised in the East, and many's the brush we had with rascally slave-dealers. Then came war with France, and, returning to home waters, we coasted along the enemy's country, popping in here and there

to survey the forts, and dropping upon any vessels that we could come across. At Brest we were under a heavy fire, and that, sir, was the time when the rascals winged me with a shot. It broke me up, and as a consequence of the wound I was laid aside for good in this old cottage."

As the two spoke they still gripped hands, while tears of excitement and happiness streamed down the sunken cheeks of the captain. Poor fellow! It was joy indeed to him to meet a comrade after all these years, and still greater happiness to find himself conversing with a man still upon the active list of the service to which he had belonged. For many years now he had occupied that cottage, and owing to the wound which had crippled him had seldom moved beyond the garden. Occasionally the old salt who lived with him, and acted as his only servant, placed him tenderly in a wheeled chair, and took him for an airing. But Southampton was beyond his reach, and Portsmouth utterly out of the question, and so it had fallen out that the captain had on very few occasions met with officers of the royal navy. A few who had retired lived in the neighbourhood, but they were active men, able to get about, and seldom dropped in for a chat at the cottage. Therefore this unexpected visit, the meeting with a man who had skylarked with him when they were lads, roused him out of his melancholy, and raised his spirits to the highest.

Seating himself beside Captain Richardson, Admiral Davies, —for that was the rank to which the officer had attained,— conversed with him in animated tones for more than half an hour, telling him of the rescue from the hold, and of the gallant conduct of his son.

"I am thankful that it occurred to me to visit the shipping myself," he said. "As a rule two officers would have been considered sufficient for the task, and it is most unusual for one of my rank to undertake such a duty. However, on this occasion I felt bound to go, for the Lords of the Admiralty are trying an experiment. The greater part of their flour is

home-grown, but prices are high, and England is not a large corn-growing country. For that reason cargoes have been ordered from America, and when the ships arrive a careful inspection of the grain is necessary. Had that not been the case I should have remained in my office, for I am in charge of the station, and thereby should have lost this opportunity of renewing our friendship. But about your son; have you decided what to do with him? He is a fine young fellow, and would look well in naval uniform."

"And he himself longs for the life," exclaimed the captain. "Though I myself had the worst of fortune in the service, and in spite of the fact that their lordships have not treated me too well, I still think that there is nothing like a commission in Her Majesty's fleet. But it is out of the question, for to obtain a nomination nowadays influence is required, and also I have not the means to supply the proper outfit. The lad would be miserable, for he would not have a sixpence to jingle in his pocket, and would have the mortification of living with comrades who were better off than himself. And besides, he is too old. To have obtained a commission I should have applied three or four years ago. Now he is seventeen, and almost a man."

"In pluck and resolution he is at any rate," said the admiral warmly, "and he deserves far more than words of thanks for his gallant action of this morning. Now listen to me. I like the lad, and, as in your case, I too am devoted to the navy. I have by chance come across a young fellow eminently fitted for the service, and I shall not stand aside and allow Her Majesty to lose the opportunity of obtaining such a suitable young officer. As your son he has a claim on the Admiralty, and when I describe to their lordships the manner in which he rescued two of my officers they will at once waive all question of his age, and I feel sure will promptly appoint him to a ship. But influence, as you very truly say, is necessary to push a young man on in the world. I do not mean that a midshipman cannot fight his way

upwards without friends, for that has been done on scores of occasions; but it gives a lad a better chance if he is put under the eye of some commander who will take an interest in him. Then he will get opportunities of special duties, and if he is a smart lad he may distinguish himself. Will you leave the matter in my hands, and trust to me to do the best for him? I would take him myself, as I have a decided interest in him, but then, as I have told you, I have a shore billet, and his duties would give him but few chances of promotion. He must be appointed to a ship cruising in foreign waters, and he must be placed under an officer who is a friend of my own. There will be no difficulty about the matter, for one of the rescued officers happens to be of excellent family, and a son of one of the sea-lords. He will see to it that the commission is granted, and I have little doubt that within a few weeks I shall be able to return to you with the information that your son is appointed to the China squadron, and under the friendly wing of Keppel, a smart young officer with whom I am well acquainted. There, say no more, for I see that you fully agree. Good-bye for the present! I shall hope to have the pleasure of calling again."

Rising from his seat the admiral squeezed the captain's hand, and then, having gone through the formality of saluting, an act of courtesy which pleased his host vastly, he walked with Tyler towards the gate, one hand placed affectionately on his shoulder.

It would be impossible to describe the delight and happiness with which each inhabitant of the tiny cottage was filled at the good news which the admiral had brought. Captain Richardson could scarcely contain himself for joy, and but for the hip which crippled him would have strutted about the place puffed up with pride at the action of his son. As for Tyler, the prospect of a commission was so fascinating and so absolutely unexpected that he felt in a whirl, and, finding conversation impossible, snatched at his cap and went bounding along the great main road.

A month later, as the captain occupied his accustomed seat in the porch of the cottage, a cloud of dust and the clatter of wheels attracted his attention in the direction of Southampton, and instantly up went his spy-glass, one hand steadied the end, and he looked casually to see what might have caused it; for to this poor crippled officer anything, each conveyance which passed, was of interest, and served to brighten the long days. He was familiar with each of the coaches which drove along the main road, the drivers in every case saluting him with their whips as they came rattling by, and no doubt turning the next moment to the passengers seated upon the box to describe the old salt who occupied the cottage. On this occasion, however, it was no coach which had given rise to the cloud of dust, but a smaller conveyance, at the sight of which the captain was thrown into a condition of excitement.

"There's not more than one which passes here in a week," he said, "and for that reason I am sure that that will be the admiral. Tyler! Tyler! Where are you? Just run down to the gate and be ready to meet him."

It proved to be the admiral, as he had prophesied, and within a little while that officer was standing before him, greeting him with a hearty shake of the hand, and looking at him with a smile the sereneness of which told that he had been successful. Behind him stepped the same two officers who had been rescued from the hold, and these at once came forward to be introduced. Then they turned to Tyler and gripped his hand in a manner which showed their gratitude.

"For you," said the admiral, suddenly producing a long blue envelope, and handing it to Tyler. "I will save you the trouble of reading it by telling you that you have been given a commission, and that orders are enclosed within for you to sail without delay for the China station. Your post will be on H.M.S. *Dido*, and your commander will be the Honourable Henry Keppel, Captain in the Royal Navy. And now, if you will kindly show my officers over the garden, I will discuss a little matter with your father.

"I have more to say," he went on, addressing Tyler's father, when the three had moved away, "and my news, I hope, will give you great pleasure. When I left you I went straight to those in authority and represented matters as I had found them. They agreed with me that it was a scandal and a shame that an officer should be treated as you have been. I pointed out that your pension was insufficient, with the result that it has been largely increased, and will enable you to reside, if you wish it, in a more populated district. Another point, you can now see your way to giving your son a small allowance, and so putting him upon an equal footing with his comrades. Then, too, I propose to help, for I am a single man, and my pay is of ample dimensions. I have taken a liking to the lad, and I mean to push his fortunes to the utmost. And now let us consider the question of his outfit, which must be gone into immediately. He will require uniform suited to this climate and also to the China seas, and must be equipped as well as the most fortunate of youngsters. That, again, I shall make my business if you have no objections, for you must recollect that you cannot easily see to the matter yourself, and, besides, it would gratify me to be allowed to provide all that is necessary. Unfortunately it turns out that no ship belonging to our fleets is bound for the East at this moment, and therefore Tyler will have to make the passage in a merchantman. But that will do no harm, for it will give him an opportunity of getting used to the sea, and will prepare him for his coming duties."

"Quite so," gasped the invalid captain, scarcely able to believe the good words to which he had been listening, or to understand the sudden change in his fortunes. "But he is no landlubber, let me tell you, Admiral, for he has hosts of friends in these parts, and during the holidays has often put to sea for quite a week at a time. He can splice and knot, for Tom Erskine, the old pensioner who acts as my servant, has taught him thoroughly. But how can I thank you?"

"Thank the lad, my dear Captain. Tyler is the one to

whom you must show your gratitude, and I, too, feel indebted to him; for had it not been for his gallant action you and I would still have remained ignorant of one another, though living separated by but a mile or two. Think of the yarns we shall have together, and of the tales of our boyhood's days which we shall be able to spin. You must come and live close into the town, and I know of a little house there which would suit you admirably, for it is posted high up, and there is a sheltered seat before it from which a more extensive view even than this can be obtained. There is many an old sailor living there who will be delighted to come in and smoke a pipe with you, and instead of sitting here alone for the greater part of every day you will find that you have a new and happier life before you; for you are a man who loves companionship, and in Southampton you will make many a friend.

"And now to complete this matter, for we have very little time in which to delay. Sit here and think quietly about the question of the house, and let me know in a couple of days or more, when I return to visit you. Meanwhile I will take Tyler to my quarters, and will see to his outfit. Let him come for a week, which will give sufficient time to the tailors to try on the various garments. Then he can return to you, and can spend the remainder of his time in England at home."

It wanted very little persuasion on the part of the admiral to convince Captain Richardson that he had made a staunch friend, who was acting for his and Tyler's benefit. And therefore he placed no difficulty in the way of the latter's proposed visit to Southampton, but instead at once shouted for him.

"The admiral has kindly asked you to go into the town with him for a week," he called out. "Run to your room at once, like a good fellow, and pack your best clothes into a bag, for you must remember that you are now a Queen's officer and must dress becomingly."

Half an hour later the admiral and the two officers who had accompanied him to the cottage took their leave of Captain

Richardson, and having been joined by Tyler, crowded into the hackney-coach which had conveyed them from the town of Southampton, and went trundling away along the road. Behind them they left the captain, jubilant at the good fortune which had suddenly come to him and his son, and eagerly looking forward to the change before him. No longer was he troubled by the question of Tyler's future, for now that was thoroughly settled. Then, again, the long dreary winter, which had usually dragged by miserably for him, was likely to prove in the coming months the happiest he had spent for many a year; for he would certainly leave this out-of-the-way spot, to which ill-health and inadequate income had fixed him, and would make his future home in Southampton, where he would be within easy reach of any who cared to show their friendship. In addition he would have the patronage of Admiral Davies, and that, together with the fact that they had been shipmates together in their earlier days, would secure a number of acquaintances—and, with such a man as Captain Richardson was, acquaintanceship would lead to certain and lasting friendships. Yes, the prospect was a bright one, and on that day, as the old white-headed sailor sat back in the porch, pipe and spy-glass in hand, and the old familiar scene before him, he felt that he was about to commence another existence altogether; he looked younger, the sunken cheeks seemed to have filled out a little, whilst the eyes sparkled in an unusual manner. Indeed, so alluring was the future that the captain remained at his post long after the hackney-coach had reached its destination, and only retired within the cottage when night was falling. Then, seated in his cosy parlour, he took up the *Navy List* and looked up the names of a few of his old comrades and that of the officer under whose command Tyler was to be.

"Yes," he murmured, "the lad will have every opportunity, for I have heard of Captain Keppel, and everyone agrees that he is a dashing and distinguished officer."

When Tyler returned to the cottage a week later his father

scarcely recognized the spruce young fellow who came walking through the garden towards him, for our hero had now discarded civilian clothes and was dressed in a blue uniform which suited him admirably. Behind him he had left in the admiral's quarters his sea-chest and a very complete outfit with which his generous friend had provided him. In addition, he came primed with the information that he was to sail at the end of three weeks, and that his destination was to be Singapore, where the *Dido* would eventually put in to victual.

The remaining days of his stay in England were extremely busy ones, for, once Admiral Davies had taken an interest in any matter, he was not the man to permit of delay. Indeed, within a very few hours of Tyler's return he drove up in a hackney-coach prepared for the reception of the invalid, with a comfortable couch and thick soft cushions stretched between the seats. On this Captain Richardson was gently placed, and the trio at once drove to the house which the admiral had selected as a likely residence. Arrived there, the captain was carried to the sheltered seat of which mention had been made, and was then shown the interior of the dwelling.

"It will do splendidly!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm as they returned to the cottage. "For, thanks to my increased income, I shall easily be able to pay the rent demanded by the agent. Then, again, the furniture in the cottage will be sufficient to fill the rooms, while outside there is a garden which with Tom's help will produce all the vegetables that we require. But more than all, the sheltered seat commands a view up and down the Water, and from it I can see not only the ships sailing there, but can look right into the harbour, while the Portsmouth road stretches like a white ribbon clearly before me, and my own seat in the porch is under view. No doubt on many a day in the future I shall fix my glass upon it, and bear in mind the times when a poor old crippled sailor sat there forlorn and eager for friends. If it can be arranged I will change houses before Tyler starts; and there should be no difficulty in the matter, for the cottage is held on a monthly

tenancy, while the residence in Southampton is ready and waiting for me."

Accordingly notice was promptly given to the owner of the cottage, while certain necessary decorations and repairs were made to the new house. Then a large van arrived, to which, under the admiral's friendly superintendence, the goods and chattels belonging to the captain were transferred, while that individual was once more put into the hackney-coach and driven to temporary quarters in the town. A few days later he was settled in his new residence, and when Tyler set sail from the harbour *en route* to Plymouth, where he was to embark upon a merchantman bound for Singapore, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his father was in comfortable surroundings, with many friends at hand. Standing by the after-rail he steadied himself against it and fixed the spy-glass, with which he had been presented by the officers whom he had rescued, upon the sheltered corner high up in the town. There was the old crippled captain, his gaze directed through his glass at the vessel which bore his son away. That he realized the fact of Tyler's presence there upon the poop was evident, for as the latter snatched at his cap and waved it about his head, the old sailor dragged a huge red handkerchief from his breast-pocket and let it blow out in the breeze. Thus did father and son take leave of one another, the former to commence a life of happiness to which he had been too long a stranger, and the latter to cross the sea, where many adventures were to befall him.

CHAPTER III

Preparing for a Journey

SIX days had passed, from the date when Tyler Richardson set out from Southampton and dropped down to the open sea, before he reached Plymouth Harbour, for the vessel upon which he had sailed had met with contrary winds, and was much delayed. However, arrive he did at last at the busy port, to find the *Alice Mary* on the point of departure. Indeed, as Tyler ascended the gangway, followed closely by his chest, the bell was ringing loudly to warn friends and relatives to leave, while the blue-peter at the fore showed that all was in readiness. Sailors were running about the decks in obedience to the orders of the captain, while passengers stood about in every position, hampering the movements of the men, as they looked towards the shore and waved their hands and handkerchiefs. A few of the gentlemen were smoking placidly on the poop, as though departure from England on a long voyage was nothing out of the ordinary, while elsewhere some of the ladies were weeping bitterly at the thought of leaving. Tyler threaded his way amongst them, and having seen the cabin which he was to occupy, and deposited his smaller belongings there, he returned to the deck and looked on at the scene with interest.

"A big muddle it all looks, does it not?" said a voice at his elbow, and, turning swiftly, he became aware of the fact that one of the passengers, a tall, bearded gentleman, stood beside him with a pleasant smile of greeting upon his face.

"But it will all settle down within a few hours," went on the stranger, without waiting for Tyler's answer, "and, bless

you! we shall all feel perfectly at home before we are much older. In fact, within a week we shall be the best of friends, and, I doubt not, shall feel as though we had known one another all our lives. By the end of the voyage some of us will have made such excellent companions that we shall be loth to part, while a few, wearied by the monotony of the long passage, will have squabbled. That is often the ending of a trip like this. But, pardon me, my name is Beverley, and I am for Singapore. May I ask your destination?"

Tyler at once told him, and then the two fell into conversation, which lasted until the ship had warped out of the harbour and was steering for the sea. Then they separated to go to their cabins, only to find that they were to share the same. And so it happened that throughout the voyage, which lasted for three months, they were continually together, and became the fastest of friends.

"And so you, like myself, are bound for Singapore," said Mr. Beverley two months after the *Alice Mary* had sailed from Plymouth; "and you tell me that you are likely to join the *Dido* there. I think that you will be fortunate if you do so, for I happen to be well informed as to the movements of the ships, and I know that the vessel of which we speak is at present in the China Sea, engaged on a special mission, and is not likely to return to Singapore until late next year. Consequently you will either have to remain kicking your heels at the latter place, or you will have to tranship and go aboard the first merchantman bound for Hong-Kong. Now let me tell you of my plans. I am engaged by the Government to go to the island of Borneo, with a view to obtaining information as to its products. At the same time I have other people's interests in hand, for I am travelling for a firm of rubber merchants who are seeking a new field from which to obtain their supplies. Once before I was in the Eastern Archipelago, and on that occasion I obtained experience which will be of great value to me and which will help me on my journey. But you may wonder why I am troubling you so

much with my own affairs, and for that reason I will explain. I told you that the *Dido* was in the China seas, and was not likely to reach Singapore for many months. But I did not say what was also in my knowledge, namely that Captain Keppel has been ordered to return by way of the archipelago, where he is to do his best to exterminate the pirates, who are very numerous and infest the islands. Now, supposing you sailed to Hong-Kong and missed the *Dido*!"

"It would be very disappointing," exclaimed Tyler, "and in that case I should scarcely be able to report myself before a year had passed."

"Quite so! but if there was news at Singapore that the *Dido* was already on her way, but would be delayed in the neighbourhood of Borneo, how would you care for a trip to the island yourself, with the hope that you might have the fortune to join her there?"

"Nothing I should like better!" burst in Tyler eagerly. "With you, do you mean?"

"That is my proposition. I want a comrade to accompany me, and if he is an officer in the British navy, all the better, for the power of England is known in Borneo, and your uniform would command respect on the coast. In the interior it would be a different matter, for there the Dyak tribes have probably never seen a white man. Indeed I hear that the country has never been explored, but rumours which have reached us through the Malays tell how the tribes within are for the most part fierce and warlike, and spend their time in attacking one another, often with the sole object in view of obtaining the heads of their enemies. But to return to my proposition. I have known you now so long that I feel sure that we should be capital friends. As I have said, I want a companion, while you desire to join your ship. Her destination is the coast of Borneo, while I also am bound in that direction. If on arrival at Singapore you find it unwise to proceed to China, and can obtain permission from the authorities, will you join me, in the hope of falling in with the *Dido*?

There will be no expense, but I can promise you a trip which you may never have another opportunity of taking."

"It would be grand, and there is nothing that I should like more, Mr. Beverley," cried Tyler with eagerness. "Of course I know nothing about this Eastern Archipelago, and indeed did not know that I was bound in that direction until a very few days before leaving England. I am sure that the excursion would, as you say, be most fascinating, and I will join you with the greatest pleasure if the authorities will allow me to do so."

"Then I think that there will be no difficulty, though I am uncertain at the present moment to whom your request should be made. I am aware that there is a resident governor at Singapore, but whether the Admiralty has a representative is another matter. In any case I should go with you, and should show my orders, which would command some amount of influence; then again, in six weeks' time, when we hope to arrive at our destination, those at Singapore will be able to tell us more about the *Dido*, and will be able to say whether she is then in the China seas or whether she is shortly due at the port. We must be guided by their report, though I think that you will find that your ship is on her way to Borneo, and to the islands thereabout. That being the case, we shall promptly get sanction for you to join me, and as soon as we have made the necessary preparations shall set sail. As for the latter, I propose to purchase a small sailing schooner, and fit her up with a quantity of muskets and a couple of six-pounder guns, for our journey will take us into a part where the pirates from Sarebus abound, and they will think nothing of pouncing upon us. However, if they see that we are fully prepared, they will be more inclined to leave us alone, while, should they be bold enough to attack us, we shall, I hope, beat them handsomely, for we shall carry a crew of Malays, besides an interpreter. But how is it that you obtained your commission? You are decidedly over the age when youngsters are admitted to the navy, and as you have never broached the

subject yourself I have not ventured to open it for fear of seeming curious. However, should you care to tell me I should be most interested to hear."

Thus invited to give an account of his adventure at the docks, Tyler did not hesitate to describe the latter in full, and to tell Mr. Beverley how Admiral Davies had come forward to help the family.

"It was done on the spur of the moment," he said, as if in excuse for his action, when referring to the rescue. "You see, there were the two officers insensible, a shout from the mate told us clearly that gas was the cause of the mishap, and, of course, after that the only thing to do was to get them out as rapidly as possible."

"That may be so, Tyler, my lad," responded Mr. Beverley warmly, "but I tell you that, though the need for rescue was apparent, there are many who would have stood there on the deck wringing their hands and incapable of giving active help. That's just where you came to the fore, and it must have been solely due to your promptness that those officers are alive to-day to tell the tale. I am glad that you have won your commission in such a manner, and I prophesy that your promotion will be rapid, for you are about to serve under a very distinguished officer, and will come to him with a character which will at once command his respect and approval. If he sees that you are level-headed and a hard worker he will no doubt give you many an opportunity of showing your worth. But it's time for dinner, and we had better go below and dress. Later on we can discuss the question of this trip to Borneo more completely. At the present moment it is sufficient for me to know that I have obtained the services of a young fellow who will be a companion, and who, moreover, will be of great assistance should it ever be our fortune to get into a tight corner."

Five weeks later the *Alice Mary* sighted the Island of Sumatra, and, having passed through the Malacca Strait, made for the harbour of Singapore. Tyler and Mr. Beverley,

having seen their baggage landed, at once went to an hotel, the latter promptly despatching a note to the governor to ask for an appointment. Then they walked about the town for an hour, to find on their return that an answer had arrived requesting them to attend at the residency immediately.

"Glad to meet you," said the governor cordially, as they were ushered into his room. "I am aware of your proposed expedition, Mr. Beverley, for I have had orders to help you as much as possible. Advices also have reached me with the information that Mr. Richardson would come here with the object of joining H.M.S. *Dido*; but I fear that there is disappointment before him, for a brig which arrived last week came with the news that the ship in question had left Hong-Kong recently in search of the pirates in the neighbourhood of Borneo, and also to forward, if possible, the work of an ardent philanthropist, by name James Brooke. I fear that our young friend will have to remain in idleness for many weeks, unless, of course, he receives orders to proceed to some other port in the Archipelago."

"Which would exactly suit him, sir," exclaimed Mr. Beverley, who at once proceeded to tell the governor of the proposal which he had made to Tyler.

"It sounds an excellent plan to keep him out of mischief," was the answer, given with a smile, "and I am sure that the voyage would be most instructive for a young fellow such as he is. As to the necessary permission, I can give you that on the spot, for there is not a single representative of the royal navy in port at this moment. I will write a letter, which he can carry with him, stating that as the *Dido* is not likely to put in an appearance for some little time, and is in all probability cruising in the neighbourhood of Borneo, this officer is to proceed there with you on the distinct understanding that he is to join the *Dido* as soon as he obtains news of her precise whereabouts. That will smooth all possible difficulties, will it not?" he went on with a pleasant smile, seating himself at the desk which stood in the room, and making ready

to write. "If questions are asked as to why he did not remain here, he has only to produce the letter; while again, should it turn out that by going with you the date of his joining is delayed longer than it would have been had he remained at Singapore, why, my written orders will clear him from all reprimand."

Taking a piece of official paper, the governor hastily scrawled some lines on it and stamped it at the bottom. Then he enclosed the letter in an envelope and sealed it with wax.

"There," he said, handing it to Tyler, "may you have a very pleasant trip! and when you fall in with the *Dido* just be so good as to give my compliments to her commander. For you, Mr. Beverley, I trust that your journey into the interior may lead to a favourable report, for I myself am deeply interested in the island, and in Mr. James Brooke, whose name I have already mentioned to you. I met him here, where he stayed quite recently, refitting his vessel, the *Royalist*, and I had the opportunity of many a conversation with him. He has the interests of the Dyaks and inhabitants of Borneo Proper at heart, and for that purpose he has sailed a second time for Sarawak. I fear that he will encounter many difficulties and dangers, and that it will be long before he meets with real success. But excuse me, I am very busy to-day, and there are many others waiting to speak with me."

Extending his hand the governor bade them farewell, and ushered them out of his room, promising to help them in their preparations if they should be in need of assistance. As for Tyler and his friend, they returned to the hotel, and began to discuss the preparations to be made before their departure.

"We shall require special clothes, of course," said the latter, "and I think that corduroy breeches and high boots, and a strong but thin linen jacket, will be necessary. A light sun-hat, which will retain its position on the head when the wearer is moving actively, must form part of the outfit, and in addition a cloak of heavy material must be taken, for in Borneo scarcely a

night passes without rain, often amounting to a heavy downpour, from which we must be protected. Indeed, my experience of these regions has taught me that a white man rapidly falls a victim to ague if he is exposed to much damp and cold. We must try to keep fever at arm's-length, and as a precaution I shall take with me an abundance of quinine, besides other drugs and surgical necessaries. A spare suit, with flannel shirts, and a supply of foot-gear, will meet our requirements, and will allow us to turn our attention to another portion of the outfit.

"Now about guns. I have already told you that I shall carry a supply on board the schooner which I propose to purchase, but I shall also obtain the best of weapons for ourselves, and in any case we shall carry with us a pair of heavy revolvers. Don't think that I am inclined to be pugnacious," he went on with a smile, "but there is nothing like being fully prepared. We may, and I'm sure I hope that we shall, pass amongst these tribes without molestation, but there is no saying for certain, and it will do no harm to let the Dyaks see that we are well armed. But I hope to win them over by presents, and for that purpose I shall take with me bales of beads and coloured cotton, besides looking-glasses, and cheap knick-knacks. A few instruments for the preservation of specimens will be necessary; and last, but by no means least, it will be desirable if you bring a suit of uniform, to be worn on state occasions.

"And now for a vessel in which to sail. As we have little time to spare, I propose that we leave for the docks at once and go to a shipping agent. If there is anything in the port likely to prove serviceable he is certain to have knowledge of the craft, and will be able to give us particulars."

Issuing from the hotel once more, Tyler and Mr. Beverley walked through the town, passing scores of natives of every hue and colour as they went. Indeed, Singapore, like many another Eastern seaport, is noted for its cosmopolitan population; and as they threaded their way through the sunlit

streets, Malays, Chinese, Hindoos from India, and many another native from adjacent parts, jostled one another. Europeans also were to be seen in abundance, but for the most part these were driving in light carriages, or were mounted upon ponies. To Tyler the scene was particularly fascinating, for he had never been in the East before, and as he walked along, his eye noted with admiration the lithe and graceful figures of the Malays, and the stolid, heavily-built appearance of the Chinese.

"Yes, John Chinaman looks dull and uninteresting," remarked Mr. Beverley, "but note his prosperity. He has found that his own native land is filled to overflowing, and that competition is too severe, and in consequence has emigrated. I have met him in divers parts, for he is to be found in large numbers in the Straits Settlements, in Borneo, and other islands in this archipelago. He has also found his way to North America and to Australia, and everywhere he is prosperous. A hard worker from his earliest days, and almost always contented with his lot, he can feed himself upon the smallest wage, and still save sufficient for a rainy day. Then in the course of years he becomes his own master, the employer of labour, and a wealthy citizen of whatever town he has made his home. But we must hurry on, for there is much to settle before we set sail for Borneo."

Half an hour later they stood upon the dock-side looking with admiration at a tiny schooner which lay moored in the basin, floating daintily upon the water.

"A derelict," explained the shipping agent, who had accompanied them to the quay. "She was found off the northern coast of Sumatra, driving hither and thither upon the sea. No one can say to whom she belonged, or how it happened that she was adrift and left all alone. Perhaps her crew went ashore somewhere in the Archipelago and were set upon by the natives. But it is idle to guess, and all that I can tell you is that she was salvaged by a vessel making for this port, and that the usual period allowed in these cases having passed

without a claimant coming forward, she is now to be sold by auction, or to any private bidder who will give the price. There, sir, you can see what handsome lines she has, and I can assure you that she is sound and seaworthy. I have already mentioned the figure asked for her, and you are at liberty to take her out for a day's cruise before coming to a definite decision. Shall I make the necessary arrangements and place a crew aboard?"

"I like her looks," said Mr. Beverley, "and we will try her. When can you be ready?"

"To-morrow morning shall see all arrangements completed, and I myself will come with you," replied the agent. "And now as to the other questions which you put to me. I can find you ten men to form a crew with the greatest ease, and I happen to know of a young fellow who would gladly go with you as boatswain. He was a sailor aboard a merchantman, but fell sick when the ship lay here discharging her cargo, and was at once taken to the hospital, where he remained for long after the ship had sailed. He is now well and strong, and eagerly looking for some work. His name is John Marshall, and I can give him an excellent character."

"Then if I like him I will engage him for the trip," said Mr. Beverley; "but what about an interpreter? It will be necessary to take someone with us who can speak the Dyak language, and I think that amongst the Malay crew should be included natives who speak some English besides their own tongue."

"The last can be easily managed, but an interpreter would be a difficulty, for you want an intelligent man, and they are few amongst these natives. But wait—it suddenly occurs to me that I know the very person to suit you. How would a Dutchman do?"

"Provided he was honest, and had no particular failing, there is no reason why he should not suit me," replied Mr. Beverley thoughtfully. "I admit that I am not charmed with the race of Dutchmen which I have met in the islands of the Archipelago, for they are indolent, and many of them, I fear,

cruel in their treatment of the natives. But some were excellent fellows, and there is no reason why this man should not prove the same. Who is he, and how comes it that he is here in Singapore?"

"That is a question which I am unable to answer," was the agent's reply. "I only know that he is here in search of employment, for I am the man who is supposed to know everything in this town. His own tale is that he comes from Java, and that he is here for his health. He is quiet and well-behaved, and, I should judge, some thirty years of age. I remember that he told me that he had been in Borneo, and could understand the Dyaks. But I will send him to call upon you, and you can form your own opinion of the man."

Having settled the matter in this way, and promised to be at the quay by daylight on the following morning, Tyler and his friend returned to their hotel, and having drawn out a list of articles which they considered useful, they sallied into the town once more and set about making their purchases. A week later their preparations were complete, the schooner had been tried and approved of, and duly bought. Then, thanks to the agent, a crew was easily found, while provisions were to be had in abundance. A Chinese gunsmith had supplied the necessary weapons, and had himself mounted the two six-pounders upon the deck.

"We will sail to-morrow at noon," said Mr. Beverley as he and Tyler retired to their hotel that evening. "I think that all our preparations are completed, and I feel that everything is most satisfactory. Our crew are sturdy, well-built fellows, while John Marshall promises to be a treasure. Of Hanns Schlott, our Dutch interpreter, I can say very little, for it is difficult to understand him. He is quiet and reserved, and never speaks unless he is addressed. But I have hopes that he will prove a good companion."

Mr. Beverley said the last few words with hesitation, and then lapsed into a thoughtful silence, which Tyler did not

venture to interrupt. But a few minutes later he turned to our hero sharply and asked him a question.

"What is your own opinion?" he demanded somewhat curtly. "How do you like the man?"

"I scarcely know," was Tyler's doubtful answer, "and I do not care to say anything now which may prove wrong in the end. But, honestly, I do not trust him. He has a hang-dog expression, and if you notice, he never looks one steadily in the face. Then again I do not admire his companions."

"Companions! Why, he describes himself as being friendless," exclaimed Mr. Beverley with some surprise. "Surely you are mistaken. Where have you seen him in company with other men?"

"On three separate occasions I have caught sight of him in close conversation with a rascally-looking fellow who has the appearance of being partly Dutch and partly Malay. I must say that I also was astonished, and watched them for some little while until they boarded a native craft which lay out in the basin. She sailed yesterday, but I said nothing about the matter, as I did not wish to prejudice you. Still, I thought it strange, and determined to mention the matter after we had set sail."

For some considerable time there was silence between the two, both being occupied with their thoughts. As for Tyler, he was bound to confess to himself that he had taken an instant dislike to the Dutchman, and felt uneasy at the prospect of his company. But then it was not his business to interfere, for this was Mr. Beverley's expedition, and besides, even though Hanns Schlott failed to please him, he would be one amongst many, and could do no harm even though he might desire to be troublesome.

"Hum! It is strange that I too have had the same feeling about this man," said Mr. Beverley. "But, for fear of doing him an injustice, I failed to mention it. But I was not altogether satisfied with him, and had it not been for the fact that it is absolutely necessary that we should carry an interpreter,

and that a suitable man was hard to obtain, I should never have accepted his services. However, he is engaged, and must accompany us, though I shall be careful to keep my eye upon him. Now let us turn out into the town for a walk. After to-morrow there will be little opportunity of taking exercise."

Early on the following morning all was bustle above and below the deck of the tiny schooner. John Marshall, the young fellow who had been engaged as boatswain, was busily handling his native crew in a manner which showed that he was a thorough sailor. Obedient to his orders, which were given in quiet but resolute tones which commanded instant attention, the Malays were stowing water-barrels in the hold, while a portion of the crew were laying out the sails in preparation for hoisting. Right aft, seated upon the six-pounder which was mounted there, was a short, thick-set individual, dressed in slouching clothes and wearing a broad felt hat upon his head. His cheeks were sallow and flabby, and his whole face was destitute of colour, save for a few black bristles upon his chin. Of moustache he had absolutely none, and his head had been cropped so close that it seemed to be entirely bald. With the brim pulled down over a pair of narrow, slit-like eyes, he sat there gazing vacantly at nothing, while he puffed lazily at an enormous pipe, now and again lifting his head to watch the smoke as it circled about him. Not once did he make a movement to help those on board, and even when Tyler and Mr. Beverley stood close beside him, tugging laboriously at an enormous case of ammunition, he did not venture to stir or lend a hand in the task. Instead, he lounged there as though he had quite made up his mind that his work would begin later on, and that here, at any rate, there was no call for the interpreter to the expedition to exert himself.

"Hanns Schlott is a ne'er-do-well, I fear," whispered Mr. Beverley a few minutes later, whilst he and Tyler were in the hold. "For the last hour he has sat there idly, looking at nothing in particular, and lifting not a finger to help those who are to be his comrades. I fear that he will prove unsuit-

able, and if only I had a good excuse, and could be certain of replacing him instantly, I would pay him a portion of the wages agreed upon and dismiss him. But then a substitute is not to be found, so that we must make the best of matters as they are and trust to things improving in the future."

Consoling themselves with this reflection, they stowed the ammunition safely and then returned on deck. By now all was in readiness for departure, and the tiny hatch of which the schooner alone boasted having been battened down, the order was given to hoist the sails. Then the rope which secured her to the moorings was cast off, and the dinghy, by means of which the operation was performed, having been attached to a ring-bolt at the stern, the little vessel swung round, and, careening to the steady breeze which was blowing, headed from the harbour of Singapore. An hour later her course was set direct for the north-western point of Borneo, towards which she sped at a gentle pace.

"Once we make the land, I propose to veer to the north and cruise along the north-western coast," said Mr. Beverley, as he and Tyler stood side by side on deck. "Then I shall look out for a river which seems wide enough for navigation, and after landing and obtaining information from the Malays who may happen to be in the neighbourhood, I shall push on up the river till the shallows or other difficulties prevent me. After that we shall act as circumstances direct, though my aim and object is to wander from end to end of Borneo Proper, ending my journey in the neighbourhood of Sarawak."

"Land ho! Land in sight!"

John Marshall's shout brought all aboard the little schooner hurrying to the deck early one morning six days after the voyage had commenced. "Away there a couple of points to starboard," he continued, directing Tyler's gaze in a line which would show him the object in view. "Hilly land, with green trees, sir, and it's Borneo, I'm thinking."

"Borneo, sure enough, John," sang out Mr. Beverley in tones of pleasure, fixing his eyes on the distant land through

a pair of glasses. "Take a look, Tyler, and tell me what you see. There is such a haze upon the water that I am confused, though I am certain, from the direct course that we have made, that the island before us is the one for which we are bound."

"I can make out a long range of hills," said Tyler, after he had taken a steady look at the distant object, "and—why, I declare that there is the very craft that lay close alongside us at Singapore."

"Where? Which vessel do you mean?" demanded his companion quickly. "Not that it matters much, or is of the least importance," he added, "for there is quite a considerable trade done with Borneo, and ships pass to and fro."

"Not vessels like that one," said Tyler under his breath, turning to Mr. Beverley swiftly and lifting a warning finger, for he had suddenly become aware of the fact that Hanns Schlott was beside them, eagerly listening to their words. "Yes," he went on, as if agreeing to what had been said, "she is no doubt just an ordinary trader, and we shall probably meet with many more. Are you going below to work out our position?"

Conscious that Tyler must have some occasion for speaking as he did, and at once noticing his signal to be cautious, Mr. Beverley indulged in one more glance through the glasses, so as to disarm suspicion, and then, taking the hint which had been thrown out, disappeared below, where he was at once joined by our hero.

"Well," he demanded, as soon as they were in the cabin and had closed the door, "why this mystery? Why is there need for caution? You puzzle me, my lad."

"Perhaps I have no right to be suspicious," answered Tyler, "but you will recollect that I told you that I had seen Hanns Schlott speaking with a stranger while at Singapore, and that he accompanied his friend on board. The vessel upon which they went is the one now in view, and its commander is the rascally-looking fellow I described to you."

"But surely—" commenced Mr. Beverley, and then suddenly

became silent. "What do you fear?" he asked in a quiet voice some moments later, turning a thoughtful face towards his young companion. "Come, do not hesitate to speak your mind, for I shall not laugh at you. You have seen something which has aroused distrust in your mind, and you are anxious. I can see that plainly, and as I know well that you are a young fellow upon whom I can rely, and moreover, that you are not inclined to cry out without a cause, I feel sure that there is really something serious. Now, what is it exactly, and, first of all, are you positive that the ship we have seen is the one upon which Hanns Schlott's friend was quartered?"

"I am absolutely certain," was the emphatic answer. "The vessel in the offing is a low-built native craft, and to anyone who had not observed her closely she would appear much the same as others to be seen in and about Singapore. However, I happened to take good stock of her, for I tell you that from the very first I have distrusted our interpreter, and I noticed that she had a large slit in her sail, which had been roughly stitched. The craft lying under the land has a jagged hole in the very same position, and I feel positive that it is the one which we are discussing."

"But supposing she is the identical boat," burst in Mr. Beverley, "surely there is nothing in the fact of her being in this neighbourhood?"

"Perhaps not. It may turn out that I am giving an alarm for which there is no need; but of this I am confident, the vessel owned by Hanns Schlott's friend is no peaceful trader, or if she is at times, she occasionally indulges in warfare of some description."

"How could you know that, Tyler? You must be romancing."

"I think not," was the steady answer. "At the time, I recollect that I merely noticed that her wood-work was riddled with bullet-holes in many places, and that while some had been the work of months ago, others had been

recently made. I remember thinking it strange, but then we were so busy fitting out for the expedition that I quickly forgot all about it. I ought to have mentioned it when we were discussing Hanns, but felt that I might have turned you against him in an unjust way. Now that I see the very same ship the whole thing recurs to me with added force, and makes me feel that all is not as it should be. You yourself have told me that pirates abound in these seas. Then why should this vessel not be one of that type, and how are you to know that Hanns Schlott is not in league with the commander and crew, and merely awaiting a favourable opportunity to take possession of this schooner?"

Tyler put the question quietly, and in as low tones as was possible, but for all that his heart beat fast, whilst his pulses throbbed with excitement. For he was a thoughtful and an observant young fellow, and was by no means dull or devoid of sense. What, then, was more likely than that news of Mr. Beverley's expedition should have leaked out and become common property at Singapore? Indeed, the governor had had tidings of it, and had Tyler and his chief only known, many in Singapore were aware of their intentions. Then was it not possible that a whisper should have reached the ears of the pirates about Borneo? And supposing that to have been the case, supposing, for an instant, that the very vessel which the two were discussing in the cabin of the schooner had chanced to put into some port near at hand to obtain a supply of provisions, and had happened to gain the tidings from a crew recently from Singapore—providing the crew and their commander were given to piracy, was it not almost certain that they would at once make plans to swoop down upon the members of what could only be a weakly-manned expedition? Yes, as Mr. Beverley reviewed the facts, he could not help but realize the gravity of the case, and at once he turned a troubled face to his companion. As for the latter, he, too, was worried, and filled with vague fears for the safety

of all on board. Had he but been able to read Hanns Schlott's thoughts at that moment he would have been more alarmed, and would have seen that there was ample cause for his concern. Indeed, a glance at the interpreter would have sufficed, for once his two leaders had retired the latter seized a glass which he carried in an inner pocket and applied it to his eye. A moment later he gave vent to a guttural exclamation of satisfaction, and having looked about him to see that he was not observed, went into the bows, where, hidden by the bulging sail, he held a big red handkerchief well above his head, and let it flutter there.

"Ja!" he growled beneath his breath. "Meinheer shall see. He thinks that Hanns Schlott is too fat and too tired to be anything but an interpreter, but he shall find out for himself. And Christian van Sonerell is there as he promised. Ha, ha, ha! He is a bad man to have such a name, but he can keep to his word. 'When you sight the island you will find me there', he said; and see, his vessel sails before us, an innocent trader for the moment, but later—ah, we shall see!"

With one more glance in the direction of the distant native craft, and a second furtive flutter of the handkerchief, he turned and went along the deck, laughing softly, as though the prospect of some piece of villainy which he were about to undertake were delighting him.

CHAPTER IV

A Traitor and a Villain

"I BEGIN to think that there is some reason in your fears, and that, after all, your good sense and powers of observation are about to save us from a very ugly encounter," said Mr. Beverley slowly, turning to Tyler after some minutes' thought. "I am a man who dislikes to do anyone an injustice, and it is on that account, and because I tried to persuade myself that I had no right to take a dislike to the man, that I determined to think well of our interpreter. But I fear that Hanns Schlott is a rogue, if not worse, and that he is a party in a conspiracy. However, we are not taken yet, and shall give much trouble before any harm comes to us. What do you advise?"

"That we arm at once," said Tyler promptly, "and show these fellows that we are prepared. Say nothing to Hanns, but watch him carefully, and at the first sign of treachery make him a prisoner. Above all, refuse to allow the native boat to come within more than hailing distance."

"Yes, the plan seems a good one, and we will set about it immediately," cried Mr. Beverley, springing to his feet. "As for this Hanns Schlott, he seems to be a rogue, and as a rogue I will treat him if he shows any inclination to be mischievous. As you suggest, I will make him a prisoner if he gives me the opportunity, and then I shall take steps to hand him over to the Dutch Government. There are numbers of his countrymen in the neighbouring island, for the Dutch have had many stations in the Archipelago for numbers of years, and by slipping round to Celebes, or across to Java, we should have

no difficulty about placing him in the custody of one of the residents appointed by his country. But I am sure that at the present moment our best plan will be to keep on terms of friendship with him, to make believe that we trust him, while secretly we keep watch to avoid treachery. Now how are we to set about it?"

"Let us call John Marshall and take him into our confidence," said Tyler promptly. "He is a thoroughly good fellow, and has our interests at heart. Shall I send for him now?"

A few minutes' consideration told Mr. Beverley that it would be as well to warn the young English sailor who accompanied them, for should there be any trouble with the crew, these three Europeans would naturally fight side by side. As for Hanns Schlott, it was useless to think of him as a friend, for the more his conduct was considered the more certain did it become that he was engaged in some dark conspiracy.

"We have to recollect that as a prize we should prove valuable," remarked Mr. Beverley suddenly. "You see, Tyler, the Government and the firm of rubber merchants for whom I am making this expedition have given me a liberal sum with which to pay my way; and indeed they are wise in doing so, for money expended now in a journey such as ours is likely to be, and presents made to Dyak chiefs, are likely to bear very good interest in the future. There are sufficient dollars aboard to make a handsome fortune, and in addition our equipment is of considerable value. Indeed, there is no denying the fact that to one of these native prahus we should be a rich haul, and it is mainly with such a prospect in view that I determined to thoroughly arm the schooner. Who can say how much Hanns Schlott and his accomplices know? If there is actually a conspiracy they must have considered it worth their while to follow us, for otherwise why should they take all the trouble? But there is no use in wondering. The question now is, how are we to protect ourselves? Forewarned is forearmed, and now that our suspicions have been

aroused, let it not be said that we have proved rash and careless. Just sing out for John, and tell him to come down at once."

Going to the narrow companion, which led to the deck above, Tyler ascended slowly, and having reached the upper level, looked carefully round. There was John standing close beside the tiller, which was manned by one of the Malays, while a few of the crew sat and lounged near at hand. Of Hanns Schlott there was not a sign, but a moment later something red fluttering in the breeze beyond the mainsail of the schooner attracted his attention, and, taking a step to one side, he saw the Dutch interpreter standing with his back against the mast, with his handkerchief held at arm's-length above his head. A second later the arm dropped, and the square of red disappeared into one of his pockets. Then, as Tyler darted back to the companion and descended a few steps, the slouching Hanns Schlott turned and came walking along the deck. A few paces carried him beyond the sail, and instantly his eye fell upon Tyler, who made pretence to be just emerging from the cabin.

"Had he been seen? Had this young Englishman, whom from the very first he had detested, been spying upon him? Hanns Schlott flushed red at the thought as he asked himself the questions, and then turned to address our hero.

"The land in sight is Borneo," he said. "Ja, I know it, for I have been there before. We have a pleasant trip before us, meinheer."

"Perhaps you have friends there," responded Tyler quietly, directing a keen glance at the Dutchman, which caused the latter's eyes to drop, while his face again flushed.

"Does he know more than he should, this young idiot?" he murmured beneath his breath. "Does he suspect the prahu lying under the land? Pooh! It is impossible, for like all of his country he is dull, and thinks it honourable to trust all with whom he comes in contact. But I must be cautious, and should he show an inclination to thwart me I will silence

his tongue for good. Ja, Hanns Schlott, you are clever, and more than once have you paid a visit to Singapore on the same errand, with Christian van Sonerell to help you. A few months back you contrived to capture a merchantman, and on this occasion you will not be baulked by any of these fools. The youngster means only to be pleasant when he suggests that I have friends at hand, and it is absurd to think that he suspects me."

Banishing all fears of discovery from his mind in this sweeping manner, the Dutchman waited only to assure Tyler that he was unknown to any in Borneo, and then went sauntering along the deck. As for the latter, he remained on the companion ladder for some moments watching the interpreter,

"He is a rogue, I am sure," he said to himself, "and the fact that I have caught him in the act of signalling to the prahu convinces me that I am right. He started when I suggested that he had companions on the island, and for the moment I could see that he feared that I had witnessed his act. Otherwise why did he address me? For he is a silent man, and during the week or more that I have known him has never ventured to say a word unless directly asked a question. Now, if I call John Marshall down into the cabin without a sufficient excuse, Hanns Schlott will begin to think that matters are not going smoothly for him. Ah, I know!"

Springing up the remaining steps of the ladder, he emerged upon the deck and walked towards the young sailor, pausing as he did so to gaze at the distant land, to which the schooner had drawn distinctly nearer, and under the shadow of which the native prahu which had aroused his suspicions still lay. Then he went to the tiller and addressed John Marshall.

"We wish to make arrangements for the landing-party," he said so that all on board could hear. "Mr. Beverley requests that you will come down into the cabin and help him in selecting the men."

Turning upon his heel he at once retraced his steps and was soon joined by the young sailor in the cabin.

"Close the door, please," said Mr. Beverley as the latter entered. "Now sit down there, John, and tell me candidly what you think of our crew?"

Thus bidden, the boatswain dropped on to a wooden form and sat there uncomfortably twirling his cap between his fingers for some minutes, as though unable to do what he was asked. Then he suddenly raised his head, and, looking first at his interrogator and then at Tyler, blurted out his news.

"They ain't right, and that's the whole matter with 'em," he said shortly. "Away in Singapore they were just easy to handle, and worked almost as hard as a British crew. But the feeding's too good for 'em by half, and they're getting above themselves. It's the truth, sir, and I tell you that they are altogether out of hand. As for the Dutch cove aboard, well—"

John Marshall shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, and lifted his hands as much as to say that the matter was beyond expression. Then he sank back on the form and looked at Mr. Beverley as if awaiting another question.

"What about Hanns Schlott then?" demanded the latter. "Do you think that he is in league with rogues who have followed us to Borneo? My young friend, Mr. Richardson, declares that the prahu lying under the island is one which was moored in the harbour at Singapore close to this schooner, and that her condition and the appearance of her commander led to the suspicion that she was not altogether a peaceful trader."

"Then he ain't far out," cried the boatswain, suddenly leaping to his feet and coming forward to lean with both hands upon the cabin table. "I don't know as how I've seen anything particular, but there's pirates in these seas, for I learnt that when in Singapore, while the Dutchman aboard is a wrong 'un. It wouldn't surprise me to hear that he had fixed it up to murder the whole lot of us, and if I had my way I'd pitch him ashore at the very first landing-place."

He gave vent to a snort of indignation, and changed his cap from one hand to the other, while he kept his eyes closely fixed upon Mr. Beverley.

"Then you will be all the more ready to follow the plan which we have decided upon," exclaimed the latter; "but secrecy is a thing which we must carefully observe. Remember this, that our suspicions may be unfounded, and that the prahu over there and our interpreter may be as innocent of treachery as we are. As for the crew, it grieves me to hear that they are not to be relied upon, and now that I have heard it I realize that should trouble come we three must depend upon ourselves alone. From this moment we must carry weapons upon us, and as soon as it is dark we must take it in turn to keep watch. Then, too, at the very first opportunity we will load our six-pounders, cramming them with grape-shot, and replacing the tarpaulin covers over the touch-holes once we have laid the fuse. If there is trouble we will rush to one end of the boat and defend ourselves there."

"Then only one of the six-pounders must be prepared," cried Tyler with emphasis, "for otherwise, while we were posted in the bows, those in the stern would lay the gun there upon us and blow us into pieces."

"Ah! I had forgotten that, my lad, and I thank you for giving the warning," said Mr. Beverley. "Who knows, it may be the saving of our lives! And now as to the watch to be set. We will divide the night into three parts, and will settle upon a signal which will awaken those who are off duty and bring them on deck."

"Then let it be a pistol-shot, if I may make so bold as to give a bit of advice," burst in John. "Yer see, sir, the crack of a little weapon like that is loud enough to reach to any part of the schooner, unless a gale is blowing, and it's so sudden-like and unexpected that it fetches yer upon yer pins before yer know what's happening. Besides, a pistol's a handy weapon to carry in one's pocket."

"And as it is the only one with which we shall be armed,

we will adopt your suggestion," said Mr. Beverley. "Then, all understand that the firing of a shot means trouble, and that all three of us instantly make for the stern of the vessel, there to fight whoever may come along. And now I propose to go on deck and take a closer look at the land. Then we will turn to the north-west and coast along in that direction until evening falls, when we will haul in and let go our anchor. Once set up for the night, you, John, will take the first watch, our young friend here joining you as soon as the Malays are out of the way, and helping to load the six-pounder in the stern. When that is done he will return to the cabin, and when you have completed three hours of your watch I shall come and relieve you, to hand over the duty after a similar period to Mr. Richardson. Here are weapons for all of us. See that you place them well out of sight and give no indication of their presence."

Going to a locker which was built beneath one of the cabin seats, he lifted the lid and groped in the interior, to withdraw his hand in a few moments grasping a bundle wrapped in a piece of old blanket. Placing it upon the table he cut the cord which surrounded it, and gingerly opened his parcel.

"The latest weapon," he said with a smile; "as you will see, some clever fellow has invented a revolving drum which will enable us to fire as many as six shots without reloading. I purchased six, so that each one of us should have twelve shots in his belt. Here is the ammunition, too, and we will at once commence to divide it."

Ten minutes later, when the three ascended to the deck, it was with curiously mingled feelings of excitement and anxiety, for who could tell what was about to happen? That some plot was afoot to capture the schooner and murder the three Englishmen upon it Tyler had no doubt, and the information which John Marshall had given as to the crew had served only to make the danger more real. Standing there beside the sail, with his eyes fixed upon the native prahu, he realized that he and his two comrades were helpless, for

how could they fight a crew of ten muscular Malays led by Hanns Schlott? And if, in addition, the men on board the prahu came to the assistance of their friends, what chance would there be of resisting them?

"We should be cut to pieces," he said to himself, "or should be driven off the boat. But we shall see. Perhaps, after all, we have no need to be frightened, and matters will turn out better than we anticipate."

To attempt to console himself with this thought was useless, for do what he would Tyler could not allay his suspicions. If he turned to the coast of Borneo his eyes invariably fell upon the prahu there, while if he tramped restlessly up and down the deck of the schooner the slouching figure of Hanns Schlott came into view, sending his thoughts once more to the evil-looking companion with whom the latter had consorted. Then again, now that his attention had been drawn to the crew of Malays who manned the schooner, he could not help but notice an air of insolence which had been strange to them a week ago. Then they had been almost too cringing and polite, while now they glanced at their three English officers as though conscious of the fact that the position was about to change. But thinking could do no good, and as every precaution had been taken Tyler and his friends had to content themselves with watching the distant shore and waiting patiently for the night to come. At length the sun disappeared behind a bank of clouds, while the light perceptibly faded. Almost at the same moment a deep bay was noticed in the coast of Borneo, and into this the schooner was promptly headed. Running in till within a mile of the shore she hauled down her sails and let go the anchor just as the short twilight which reigns in the Archipelago gave place to darkest night.

"Now is your time to see about the gun," said Mr. Beverley, who had taken his station beside Tyler. "The natives have their meals at this hour and will be huddled together in the bows. Our interpreter is seated at this moment in his

cabin, where he will be out of the way. Get the work done quickly, and let me know when all is in readiness."

Tyler at once ran to carry out the orders, for now that the night had fallen he realized that if trouble were in store for them it would be at such a time, when darkness covered the water and hid their surroundings. Going to the bulkhead which closed one end of the cabin, he unlocked the door there and entered the tiny magazine with which the schooner was provided. Then he emerged again with the necessary ammunition, and ere long was able to assure his leader that all was in readiness. That done he lay down upon his bunk and attempted to sleep, but without success; for though he closed his eyes tightly his brain still remained actively at work, while his ears were ever open for that pistol-shot which was to give the signal agreed upon. Hour after hour dragged wearily by, and it was a relief to him when at last Mr. Beverley touched him upon the shoulder and told him that it was time for him to go on deck and take his turn in looking after the safety of the vessel.

"There has not been a sound," he whispered, "and nothing has occurred so far to arouse our suspicions Both John and I have endeavoured to discover the position of the prahu, but the night is too dark. When we ran into the bay she was some distance higher up the coast, and for all we know may have anchored there. Keep your eyes and ears open, and do not hesitate to give the signal if there should be cause."

Promising to follow the advice given to him, Tyler leapt from his bunk and crept up on deck, to find that the schooner lay without a movement on the water, and that the sky above was lit up by myriads of bright stars. All round, however, was impenetrable gloom, and though he went to either side of the schooner, and with arms leaning upon the bulwarks peered into the darkness, nothing caught his eye, while there was no sound save the gentle lisp of the water against the vessel's side to attract his attention.

"What was that?" He stood still beside the companion

which led from the cabin and listened eagerly, while his heart beat heavily and thumped almost audibly against his ribs. "Ah, there it was again; a splash somewhere near at hand!"

Darting to the side he slipped his boots from his feet, and then ran silently along the deck till close to the bows, when he suddenly caught sight of a figure standing before him. In an instant his hand grasped the butt of one of his revolvers, and, drawing the weapon, he advanced upon the man.

"Who is that?" he demanded in low but commanding tones. "Answer at once."

At the words the figure before him started suddenly and turned swiftly about. Then a second voice broke the silence.

"Who but Hanns Schlott, meinheer?" was the answer, in tones which the speaker endeavoured to render suave. "Who but the interpreter, who, finding sleep impossible on this fine night, has come upon deck to enjoy silence and solitude."

"Then what caused the splash?"

"The splash, meinheer! Ah! I recollect there was a rope coiled here beside the halyard, and as I leaned against the rail my arm touched it, and it fell into the water. See, here it is; I will pull it on board."

He grasped a thick cable close at hand, and pulled upon it till the end came over the bulwark and fell upon the deck. Then, yawning loudly, he bade Tyler a curt "good-night!" and disappeared below, leaving the latter standing upon the deck full of suspicion and with vague fears of some unknown but impending trouble. Indeed, had he but followed the crafty Dutchman to his cabin, and watched his behaviour there, the signal which had been agreed upon would have at once awakened the silence of the night, and brought his two comrades rushing up to support him. But his duty was to watch above, and therefore, slipping his boots on to his feet, once more he slowly trudged the length of the vessel, halting every now and again to listen intently for sounds, and stare into the darkness. Meanwhile Hanns Schlott had disappeared within his cabin.

"All is well," he was saying to himself, as he knelt beside the tin trunk which contained his possessions. "The young fool was suspicious, that I could see, but my word satisfied him, and he is now tramping the deck in the full belief that no danger threatens. But Hanns Schlott knows better. Ha, ha! Christian van Sonerell will make nothing of the climb on to the schooner, though the rope which I had secured over the side would have been of great service to him. In a little while he will be here, and then I shall be ready."

Searching amongst the contents of his trunk he produced an enormous pistol, which he carefully examined. Then, thrusting a small bag of money into one of his pockets and gently closing the lid of the box, he stole from the cabin, weapon in hand, and went creeping across the floor in the direction of the bunk in which lay Mr. Beverley. Twice he came to a sudden halt in the course of his murderous journey, and crouched there silent and motionless beside the cabin table, for the rustle of the sleeper's bed-clothes, and an interruption in the regularity of his breathing, told that Mr. Beverley was not so deeply unconscious as this rascally Dutchman would desire. Indeed, for a minute or more it seemed as though some sense of impending danger, some vague dream of a levelled weapon and the hand of an assassin, had crossed the mind of the sleeper, for he suddenly awoke to a troubled half-consciousness, and, raising himself upon an elbow, peered with blinking eyes into the darkness. Did he hear anything? He lay there so still, breathing so silently, that the Dutchman's craven heart leapt into his mouth, while the fingers which grasped his weapon trembled as though they would relinquish their grasp. Squeezing his body as far as possible beneath the table he crouched still closer to the floor, in the attitude of a tiger about to spring upon his victim. And all the while he kept those slit-like eyes fixed in the direction of the bunk, while his ears listened eagerly for outside sounds.

"Will those fools never come?" he said with many a curse

beneath his breath. "If only Christian van Sonerell and his men would arrive at this moment I would send the bullet crashing into his body. And if this man should stir again I will press the trigger without a doubt. Ja, I will risk it, for to be discovered now would be to ruin our enterprise and get myself into trouble. Ah! the dolt thinks better of it, and has placed his face once more upon the pillow. Then I will remain as I am and give him a few minutes longer to live. By then he will have settled to sleep once more, and will fall the more easily to my weapon. Hist! There is someone moving."

As he spoke, a slight sound from the far end of the alleyway, where John Marshall had his quarters, broke upon the villain's ear, and instantly he became even more alert, while once more an unsteady arm levelled the pistol, prepared to turn it upon the sleeper or on anyone else who should be so unfortunate as to come into the cabin and disturb him in the midst of his work. "Ah!" Hanns Schlott's head became suddenly erected, while the face turned involuntarily with a rapid movement towards the companion ladder. At the same moment the splash of an oar broke the silence, causing Tyler to suddenly halt in his restless tramp upon the deck and then dash towards the side. There it was again, followed in succession by others, proving that a boat was approaching, while scarcely had the fact dawned upon his senses than a dim object, rapidly becoming more visible through the darkness, suddenly came into view. Whipping a weapon from beneath his coat, he levelled it in the direction of the object and gave vent to a shout.

"Stop there!" he cried in piercing tones. "If you pull a stroke nearer I will fire into you. Halt, I say!"

Leaning upon the rail which guarded the schooner's side, he stretched towards the oncoming boat, closely watching its movements, while at the same time he eagerly listened for sounds from below, for some sign which would tell him that Mr. Beverley and John Marshall had sprung from their bunks and were rushing to his aid. Nor was he destined to be kept

long waiting, for hardly had the words left his lips, warning those on the boat to come no nearer, than a pistol-shot rang out in the night with startling loudness, the sharp report rushing up from the cabin below. Then a piercing shriek awakened the echoes, telling of the foul crime which had just been committed. Almost instantly there was the noise of a scuffle below, followed by the soft thud of a heavy blow delivered, and a second afterwards a crash and the sound of splintering wood as some unwieldy body fell upon the table.

Utterly bewildered at the turn which events had suddenly taken, Tyler stood there leaning upon the rail, dumbfounded and uncertain how to act. Not for long, however, did he hesitate, for whatever the trouble below there was no doubt that a serious danger threatened them outside. Indeed, one quick glance told him that in spite of his warning words the dim ghostly object which he had caught sight of was rapidly approaching, while the splash of oars became now still more distinct. Instantly his finger closed round the trigger of his weapon, and just as the clatter of heavily-booted feet ascending the companion told him that John Marshall was at hand, his revolver spoke out, sending a bullet into the very centre of the men crowded together in the oncoming boat. There was another shriek, still more piercing than that one which had ascended from below, while a shadowy figure, which he could just see through the gloom, suddenly tossed a pair of lanky arms into the night and then collapsed in a heap. But what was a life to these marauders? With a savage heave, as the lifeless body fell upon him, one of the oarsmen tossed his dead comrade overboard, and then bent to his oar once more, stimulated to do so by the encouraging shouts of a burly individual who stood in the bows of the boat.

"On them!" he shouted in stentorian tones, using a mixture of the Dutch and Malay language. "Clamber aboard and slit the throats of any of the Englishmen who may still be alive. Pull for it, for if you do not hurry Hanns Schlott will have done the work, and you will be disappointed."

Bang! Once again Tyler's smoking revolver launched a missile at the enemy, a shrill cry of pain clearly denoting the fact that it had found a billet. Then John Marshall's lithe figure suddenly appeared beside him and another weapon opened into the darkness. In rapid succession, and with steady and unerring aim, did the two young fellows fire upon the pirates. But they might have been a hundred yards away for all the effect they produced, for these men were used to such scuffles, and were not to be so easily turned aside, particularly when they recollected the fact that the schooner had at the most but three white men to protect her, whilst on board were staunch allies of their own. Every moment they waited to hear the voice of the Dutchman, Hanns Schlott, who had so cleverly obtained the post of interpreter. They listened eagerly and peered into the gloom as they plied their oars, looking to see his bulky figure at the head of the Malay crew. Nor was their patience severely tried, though in the case of the rascally Dutchman they were doomed to disappointment; for when a few yards separated the bows of their boat from the schooner's side, ten dusky figures came rushing from their quarters for'ard and swept in a body along the deck.

"Look out!" shouted Tyler in warning tones. "The crew have joined against us and we must fight for our lives. Back to the stern, but first of all where is Mr. Beverley, for we cannot think of retiring till he is with us? Steady, John! Stand side by side with me, and rush for the cabin."

Grasping his comrade by the sleeve, Tyler made a movement towards the companion, with the full intention of darting down into the space below and rescuing his leader. But scarcely had he moved a pace than the strong fingers of the boatswain arrested his progress and urged him towards the stern.

"Yer can't do it. It's out of the question, I tell yer, sir, for Mr. Beverley's dead, he's been murdered by that scoundrel."

"Dead! Killed by Hanns Schlott!" exclaimed Tyler, instantly realizing that any deed of violence and treachery must

be attributable to the Dutchman. "How awful! But how do you know? Are you not making a terrible mistake?"

He blurted out the words in short sentences, and remained there, determined not to budge an inch or to do anything to secure his own retreat until he was assured by his companion that it was useless to attempt to bring help to their leader. And all the while the two young fellows stood resolutely side by side, resolved to support one another to the end, and die rather than submit, for each realized that capture would be followed by nothing else but a cruel death. Indeed, the knowledge that that would be their end without a doubt should they fall into the hands of these enemies who had suddenly sprung up from the darkness braced their nerves, and helped their determination to fight desperately. Dragging their reserve weapons from their belts they levelled them at the crew who had mutinied, whilst each kept his eye turned ever and anon to the side from which the boat-load of pirates was approaching, prepared to send a bullet in that direction the instant the marauders appeared.

"Quick! How do you know that he is dead, that this villain, Hanns Schlott, has murdered him?" demanded Tyler hoarsely. "Tell me at once, for otherwise I will dash below and see things as they are for myself."

Once more he stepped towards the companion as though doubtful of the information which his companion had given, and anxious to clear up the mystery of Mr. Beverley's absence for himself. But a shout from John and a firm grip of his fingers once more arrested him, while the explanation of this strange silence of their leader, the reason why he was not there to stand or fall beside them, was hissed into Tyler's ears.

"He's dead, sure enough," said John Marshall. "Just before your shout to those beggars came rushing down below I thought I heard suspicious sounds in the cabin. I didn't like to think that some villainy was afoot, and so I just hopped out of my bunk and came into the alleyway. Then I stole

softly into the cabin, match-box in hand, and a lucifer between my fingers. I was just in the act of striking a light when your shout startled me. A second later a pistol went off within three yards of where I stood, while Mr. Beverley gave a shriek which made my blood run cold. I dropped the match in my terror, but a second after it flared up in the darkness, lighting the cabin from end to end, and showing me Hanns Schlott kneeling on the floor with a smoking pistol in his hand. Like a flash I guessed the murdering game he'd been after, and I scarcely gave him time to get on to his feet when I was upon him. I just gave a jump across the cabin and then let fly with my fist, sending him crashing into the table. Then I struck another lucifer, and finding him capsized all in a heap, and completely stunned, I ran across to Mr. Beverley. He's dead I tell yer, sir, for there's a bullet wound as big as my fist over his heart and not a breath came from his lips. Let's get back to the stern."

Hissing the words in Tyler's ear, but a few moments had been employed in imparting the information. But short though the interval had been, it had been sufficient to increase the gravity of the position, for by now the crew of Malays who had manned the schooner, and who up to this had hung back awaiting the arrival of Hanns Schlott to lead them, had decided to attack without his help, and one of their number springing forward, kriss in hand, the remainder came rushing in a body towards the two young Englishmen, brandishing their weapons above their heads and shouting at the top of their voices. Almost at the same instant the rays from the lantern, which was slung as a riding-light in the for'ard part of the schooner, fell upon the villainous face of the Dutchman, Christian van Sonerell, who came climbing over the bulwarks, quickly followed by a dozen cut-throat Malays.

"Back to the stern!" shouted Tyler, turning swiftly about. "Get behind the gun and stand ready to shoot!"

Joined by John Marshall, he raced towards the end of the schooner till his progress was suddenly obstructed by a cable

which stretched from the rail to the end of the tiller, and then again across to the opposite bulwarks.

"Look out for the rope!" he cried in warning tones. "Now step over it, and give it a hitch to pull it taut. It will stretch as a barrier between us and the Malays."

Quick to grasp his meaning, the young boatswain thrust his weapons into his belt so as to set his hands free, and then, darting to the side, rapidly unloosed the rope which kept the tiller amidships and from swaying from side to side as the vessel lay at anchor. With the deft fingers of a sailor he rearranged it, pulling it taut till it stretched between the bulwarks like a bowstring. Then, finding that there was some yards of slack, he darted forward once more to where the binnacle stood some six feet beyond the end of the tiller, and, making a turn of the rope around it, brought the tail-end to the opposite side.

"That'll fix 'em!" he cried in tones of excitement as he returned to Tyler's side. "It's too dark for those fellows to see the cable, and they'll find themselves brought up sharp when they come rushing towards us. Are yer ready for them, sir?"

Meanwhile Tyler had been by no means idle, for there was much to be done to prepare for the contest. Seeing that his companion had realized the help which the rope barrier would give them, he turned his attention to the gun, and hastily threw off the tarpaulin jacket with which it was covered. Gently running his fingers over the breach, they quickly came in contact with a small heap of powder which he had carefully left in position there when loading the weapon. A moment's search discovered the touch-hole, and a rapid movement of the hand swept the glistening grains over it. Stooping down he looked along the barrel, and aided by the light cast by the lantern which swayed in the for'ard rigging, and with one hand turning the wheel which altered the elevation, he rapidly levelled the barrel so that the contents would sweep about waist-high across the deck. A slight movement of the breech towards the left pointed the gun clear of the binnacle

and towards that portion of the ship where the pirates were massing.

"That's done," he shouted in answer to John Marshall's question; "and now I'm ready to blow a hole through the rascals. Stand aside, John, and just keep your eye upon them. The lamp swings in just the right position, and by its aid every one of the enemy can be seen as he moves. It is more than likely that the leader is the only one possessed of a pistol, so watch him closely, and when you see him about to fire let drive with your own weapon. I will stand beside the gun, but unless they rush at us in one dense body I shall not discharge it, for the ropes will protect us, and, moreover, it is probable that at first only a few of the most courageous will venture to attack. Later on, when matters become more serious, I will fire my pistol over the touch-hole and send a shower of grape scattering through them. Ah, there is the ringleader, and by his movements he is about to lead them to the assault!"

CHAPTER V

Escape from the Schooner

SCARCELY five minutes had elapsed from the time when Hanns Schlott's cowardly finger had pressed the trigger and sent the murderous bullet into the breast of the sleeper. Indeed, to Tyler, as he stood there upon the stern, pistol in hand, prepared to discharge the contents of the six-pounder into the midst of the pirates, the sharp report, that piercing, piteous scream still rang in his ears, while the thud of John's massive fist and the crash and noise of splintering wood-work as the rascally Dutchman was knocked to the floor were fresh in his memory. Then had come the rapid appearance of the boatswain, to be followed shortly afterwards by the figures of the mutinous crew rushing up on deck to aid their comrades. And all the while his own weapon had been snapping, sending a shower of bullets amongst the occupants of the approaching boat. So much had happened in that short space of time, so rapid had been the succession of events, that the moments had flown by. Now, however, it was so different, for, waiting there beside the gun, with one companion alone to support him, to help him face a horde of ruffians intent upon their lives, the seconds seemed minutes, the minutes hours, so desperate was the situation. A shout, a shot in their direction, or the sudden rush of the pirates would have been a welcome relief to the tension, but as yet their condition was unchanged.

Thanks to the light shed by the riding-lamp, both he and John Marshall could see the Malays grouped upon the deck, and could watch as their leader, Christian van Sonerell, went amongst them, urging them to dash aft and fall upon the white

men. At length, rendered desperate and utterly reckless by the precarious position in which he found himself, Tyler levelled his pistol at the leader of the pirates, and taking deliberate aim, pressed steadily upon the trigger. At once there was a shout, and the Dutchman swung round with a curse, showing that the bullet had struck him. Indeed, there was little doubt that he was heavily hit, for he staggered to one side, and would have fallen had it not been for the mast against which he placed one hand. But he was a sturdy fellow, this rascally marauder, and to do him but common justice he was not the man to cry out till badly hurt, or to give in till thoroughly beaten. With a gasp, therefore, he recovered his breath, and at once leapt in front of his following.

"At them!" he shouted. "Get together on this side and rush at them in a body. Now, I will lead you."

Turning for one moment to his men, he swung round in the direction of the stern, and as if to show his hatred of the white men, he levelled a pistol and fired, sending a bullet swishing so close to Tyler's head that the latter stepped aside involuntarily. Then, tossing the weapon to the deck, he drew a cutlass from his belt, and, snatching a second pistol with his left hand, led the pirates in a mad rush towards their victims.

"Some are hanging back," shouted Tyler, "so I will do as I said. If they come on too strongly it will be madness to wait, and I shall fire the gun and then do my best with my pistol."

"And what then?" demanded John Marshall eagerly. "Are we to stay here on the deck and get sliced to pieces? Why, it's throwing our lives away!"

"What else can we do?" said Tyler eagerly. "We are hemmed in, so far as I can see, and have no means of flight."

"But what about the dinghy?" asked his companion swiftly. "Ain't she all right? What's to prevent us jumping overboard and swimming to her? It wouldn't take no more than a minute, and then before these beggars guess what we were up to we'd be into her and dodging away in the darkness."

Tyler had barely time to give his assent to the proposal when the Dutchman and his followers were upon them. Scampering along the deck, they came in a confused crowd towards the stern, each one grasping a weapon, and all with their eyes fixed upon the two solitary figures standing there. That those who came close behind their leader were filled with courage and with the determination to be victorious there was little doubt, for the eagerness with which they dashed forward showed it plainly. Quite a number, however, showed far less resolution, for the Malay does not love a struggle which is likely to prove difficult, and dangerous to his life. Some there may be of the pirates whose days are passed in stern encounters, but the majority spend their time in looking for helpless individuals upon whom they may fall suddenly and when least expected. Here, however, the matter was quite different, for opposed to them, and standing beside a gun which, for all they knew, might be crammed to the muzzle, were two of the three Englishmen whom they had hoped to make easy victims. That they would fight, and fight hard too, was evident, for otherwise they would have thrown down their weapons at the sight of so many enemies and begged for their lives. But this they had shown no inclination to do; and that fact, combined with the resolute air with which they faced the tide of pirates rushing down upon them, caused a few of the more faint-hearted to hold back. Instead of racing recklessly forward they halted there upon the deck, and made up for their lack of courage by shrieking shrill words of encouragement to their friends.

Crash! The Dutchman, charging madly upon the gun, came in contact with the rope stretched between the binnacle and the bulwarks, and in a moment his feet were cut from under him and he pitched forward upon his face; a huge Malay followed, kriss in hand, and attempted to leap the unseen obstacle. But he failed to rise sufficiently high, and catching his toes upon the cable came with a thud upon his leader. The third was more cautious, for, realizing the cause of their

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downfall, and the crafty trap which had been set for the attackers, he stretched his hand into the darkness and felt for the rope. A second, and his fingers lit upon it, when his weapon flashed above his head as he prepared to sever the hempen obstacle. But John Marshall was closely watching the scene, and realizing that once the barrier had gone their chances would be lessened, he stretched towards the man and, just as the blow was falling, fired point-blank at him. Then with a shout he leapt the rope which stretched from the tiller, and dashing upon the Malay who had fallen upon his leader, he clutched him by the waist and tossed him over the side.

"Well done!" cried Tyler enthusiastically; "but get back at once, for the others are coming. Quick, or they will be upon you!"

The warning to which he had given vent came by no means too soon, for hardly was John Marshall in his former position than the leader of the pirates sprang to his feet and once more rushed upon his opponents.

"English dogs!" he shouted in his fury; "for the fall which you have given me I will make you suffer well. You shall know what it is to scream with pain, and then—"

He did not finish the sentence, for, failing to notice the second rope, stretching between the tiller and the bulwark, he came into violent contact with it, and, as in the former case, fell sprawling upon the deck. Another second and the active John had plucked him by the coat, and with a quick heave had sent him sousing into the sea.

"Stay there, you Dutchman!" he cried with a short laugh, "and let that teach you to be more cautious when next you attack a Britisher. Ah, no you don't, my beauty!"

The last part of the sentence was addressed to one of the Malay crew, who, taking advantage of the fact that John Marshall was fully engaged in dealing with Christian van Sonerell, had crept on all-fours along the deck, and, feeling in the darkness for the obstacles which had been the undoing of his comrades, had safely negotiated them, and at that moment

sprang, kriss in hand, to his feet. Then, as the boatswain turned towards him and gave vent to the words, the Malay darted forward and lunged at him with his weapon with such swiftness that it was only by springing swiftly aside that John escaped the blow. Next second the butt of his pistol crashed into the native's face, and he, too, tumbled full length beside the binnacle.

"Didn't I tell yer that yer wouldn't do it," growled John in low tones of excitement. "Jest look out for that other fellow, sir."

"Right!" exclaimed Tyler in reply, "I'm watching carefully, and that will stop him."

Hoping to rush in upon the Englishmen while their attention was distracted, two of the Malay pirates had followed the example set by the one whom John had stunned with his pistol, but, unfortunately for them, they had failed to discover the position of the rope with sufficient celerity, and as they fumbled in the darkness they rose so far from the crouching position which they had assumed that their heads suddenly became outlined against the swaying lamp behind. The movement was fatal, for ere they could avoid the shot Tyler had pointed his weapon in their direction, and, aided by the feeble rays beyond, had sent a bullet crashing into the nearest.

"Perhaps that will stop them," he cried in tones which betrayed no little excitement. "These fellows must not be allowed to think that they are to have it all their own way. Indeed they seem to be inclined to hang back, and I begin to think that a rush on our part might clear the decks. They are without a leader, and now is the time to attack them. Make ready for a charge."

There was little doubt that the proposal which Tyler had so boldly made might, in the absence of the rascally Dutchman who led the pirates, have proved more than ordinarily successful, for the losses which they had already suffered, the unlooked-for manner in which they had been opposed, and the sudden downfall of Christian van Sonerell, had filled the

Malays with dismay. Some, indeed, had hung back from the very first, recognizing with the instinct of men possessed of little courage that danger and death were possibly in store for them. But now, finding themselves so suddenly arrested in their furious attack, and their leaders brought crashing to the deck by some unseen means, the remainder faltered, and, as Tyler's last pistol-shot rang out, to be followed instantly by the heavy thud of a falling body and by the clatter of a native kriss upon the deck, they turned about in a body and fled into the bows, placing as great a distance between themselves and the weapons of their opponents as was possible. Peering into the darkness, they looked towards the stern with anxious eyes, and noted with feelings almost of despair that the two Englishmen whom they had hoped to kill so easily were stepping across the rope which had formed a barrier between themselves and their numerous opponents. Indeed, so terror-stricken were they at the sight that thoughts of flight instantly occurred to them, and they would have rushed to the boat which had brought them from their own prahu to the schooner had not a head suddenly appeared over the bulwark where it was secured. Then an arm came into sight, whilst the feeble rays of the lamp struggled down upon the dripping figure of a man clambering over the rail. It was Christian van Sonerell, and at the sight cries of delight escaped the Malays. They sprang forward to help him, and then crowded about him while they urged him in pleading tones to leave the schooner or to lead them once more against the Englishmen.

"They are too strong for us, and we fear their gun," cried one of them. "By some means of which we are ignorant they have caused you and others of our comrades to come crashing to the deck, and see how swiftly fate has followed them. You, too, also came to grief, and when we saw you tossed overboard as if you were a child we gave you up for lost, and seeing that the white-faces were about to turn and rush upon us we contemplated flight. But you are here once more, you have rejoined us by a miracle, and we again place ourselves in your

hands. Shall we gather in a body and attack them for the second time, or is it your advice that we retire and leave these men to themselves? for it is clear that much suffering will come upon us before they are conquered."

"Leave them! Fly like hounds from the schooner and forsake the spoil which is already in our hands! Surely you are children to make such a proposal! You laugh at me and would make believe that you are frightened!" cried Christian van Sonerell, turning suddenly upon them, and staring each one in the face as if he would read his inmost thoughts. "Leave the vessel when there is gold below, and when we have expended so much time and patience to take her! You are joking and cannot mean what you say. You see for yourselves that the two English fools have been favoured by luck, and, taking advantage of my disappearance, have been bold enough even to think of driving you from the deck. Now look at them. As I came climbing over the rail they hesitated, and now have retreated to their old position, out of which we will drive them. Forward, my men! Follow Christian van Sonerell!"

While the rascally Dutchman had been haranguing his men, Tyler and his companion had paused to discuss the question of attacking the Malays. A moment before they were intent upon rushing upon them, for that they were disheartened and demoralized was easily to be seen. But the aspect of affairs had suddenly changed, and as Christian van Sonerell had remarked, his unexpected appearance had caused them to alter their determination.

"They have gathered in a body again," cried Tyler, stretching out an arm to detain John Marshall, "and see, there is their leader. What bad luck for us! For I had hoped that he had disappeared over the side for good. But he is with his men again, and there is no doubt that he will persuade them to renew the attack. Stand back, John, and employ the breathing-space allowed us in reloading our weapons. Then we shall be prepared to fight them again."

"Ay, that we will, sir," was the ready answer; "we'll stand by one another as firm as two rocks, and when things get too warm for us, why, we'll be over the stern before they can look round. But I reckon that this time it will be a case for the gun."

"I think so too," agreed Tyler, looking along the deck and noting with some concern that the mood of the pirates had already changed. Their leader is no doubt telling them of the gold and stores below, and of the riches they will lose if they retreat. Depend upon it, now that they know of the presence of the ropes they will hack them asunder and come at us in a body. Well, if they do I'm fully prepared."

At the words he thrust one hand into his pocket and commenced to rapidly replace the emptied cartridges in his revolver. Then, flicking a few more grains of powder into the touch-hole of the gun, lest by chance a gust of wind or some sudden jolt during the past conflict should have disturbed the fuse which he had already prepared, he placed the muzzle of his weapon across the top of the hole, and held it there in readiness to send a charge of grape bursting through the ranks of the pirates. As for John Marshall, the success which they had already enjoyed, the fact that it was he who had tossed the Dutchman overboard, and the example of coolness which Tyler had set him seemed to have raised his spirits to the highest. With a short reckless laugh he, too, commenced to cram cartridges into his weapons, and having completed the operation to his satisfaction, stood close beside his companion, one hand resting upon the bulwark and his eyes fixed upon the gathering of natives beyond.

"Helloo!" he suddenly exclaimed, as the rays from the swinging lamp fell upon a figure ascending from the cabin below, "there's our friend the interpreter, looking a little upset after the blow I've given him. Just stand aside, Mr. Richardson, while I take a shot at the fellow. He's only a murderer, and if we treat him like a dog, neither he nor his comrades can complain."

Lifting his left arm till the wrist was on a level with his eyes, John Marshall rested the muzzle of one of his weapons there, and took steady aim at the bulky figure of Hans Schlott, which could be seen in the companion-way. Squinting along the barrel, he was in the act of pulling the trigger when a movement on the part of the criminal disturbed his aim. Indeed it almost seemed as though Hans Schlott had dreamt of the danger threatening him, for in spite of the fact that the figures of the two young Englishmen were with difficulty visible through the darkness which covered the vessel, he suddenly ducked and disappeared below, the movement undoubtedly saving his life. A minute later he reappeared from the direction of the bows, having crawled to the deck by way of the men's quarters. Then he staggered towards Christian van Sonerell, as if still suffering from the stunning blow which John Marshall had delivered, and at once commenced to address him.

"On them!" he shrieked in high-pitched tones, which grated upon Tyler's ears. "Rush at them, and sweep them out of existence, for if you do not, I tell you that we are doomed. Our lives will not be safe for another hour, for one of them, known to us as John Marshall, happened by ill chance to be in the cabin when I fired. He saw the deed, and I know well that neither he nor the other young fool will rest until we are captured. They must not escape! We must kill them, and then send their bodies to the bottom of the sea with some pounds of shot at their feet. Quick, I say, or even now, when the odds are against them, they will give us the slip, and bring a certain end to our fortunes."

He gripped Christian van Sonerell by the arm so fiercely that the latter almost winced, while he bellowed the words in his ear as if the Dutchman were a mile away. Then, leaning against the bulwarks to support his unsteady weight, he shook his fist with frantic energy at the two dim figures to be seen in the stern, and called loudly to them.

"Listen to me, you fools of Englishmen!" he shouted. "You

think that because you have resisted us so far you will escape us altogether. But I tell you that that will not be the case. For lives which you have already taken you shall pay, and I prophesy that within five minutes both of you will be slain like your comrade below. Him I killed with my weapon, and see now, this is for you, Tyler Richardson."

Scarcely had the words left his lips than a pistol-shot rang out, and a bullet struck heavily against the front of the binnacle, shattering there into a hundred fragments, which splashed the two young fellows standing beyond. A moment later Tyler's voice broke the silence.

"A bad shot and an unsteady hand," he called out. "Now, hear my words, Hans Schlott, and you, too, who have aided him in this murderous attack. I swear that if I escape from this ship with my life I will never rest till I have hunted you down, for you are murderers. In cold blood you yourself killed my comrade, and for that act you shall be punished. Now, take my advice, leave the ship at once, for if you attack I will fire the gun and blow you to atoms."

That the warning to which he had given vent caused consternation amongst the Malay pirates was evident, for up to this they had imagined that owing to the suddenness of their attack, and to its unexpected nature, the six-pounder in the stern of the schooner was harmless, and that Tyler's behaviour in arranging a fuse and tossing the covering aside was merely a blind with which to frighten them. Now, however, his own words assured them of the fact, for quite a few were able to understand their meaning, and instantly those who from the first had been inclined to show the white feather retreated to the bows of the ship, where they displayed every sign of terror. But it was not likely that two desperate men such as the Dutchmen were would permit themselves to be baulked of their prey in such a manner. Indeed, so carefully had their plans been made, so completely did Hans Schlott imagine that he had hoodwinked the leader of the expedition and his companions, that he was convinced that the sudden attack, the

rising of the crew, and the arrival of a boat-load of Malay pirates had been unforeseen, and that plans for defence were wholly unprepared. Thanks to the secrecy which Tyler had observed, the crafty interpreter was ignorant of the fact that a conspiracy was suspected, and at the news that Tyler ventured to give him he openly scoffed, and at once turned to reassure the native following.

"He lies!" he shouted. "Until I fired he was walking the deck half in his sleep, while his two companions lay below resting in their bunks. But for the weapons which they carry in their belts they have not a cartridge between them, while I swear to you that the gun is empty. Come, lead our men forward, Van Sonerell, and clear these Englishmen from our way."

"Head the charge yourself," was the answer, "and show us that you too are able to fight. For myself, I will rush at them by your side, and do my best to help you; but much must not be expected of me, for, see here, my strength is gone, and I am weak with loss of blood."

He pointed to his left shoulder, where Tyler's bullet had struck, and showed a large red patch which oozed through the cloth, and, mingled with the salt water with which his garment was saturated, splashed heavily to the deck.

"Then join me and do your best," cried Hans Schlott, roused to desperation by the thought that if Tyler and his companion escaped there would be no peace for him, at any rate, in the neighbourhood of Borneo. "Forward, my men, for I swear to you that you have nothing but their pistols to fear. The gun contains air alone, and can do you no harm," he continued, turning to the Malay crew. "Come, we will rush at them and bear them from the deck."

Snatching a cutlass from one of them, he waited to see that they were ready to aid him, and then came full tilt along the deck, his eyes fixed upon the six-pounder, which was dimly visible, and the direction of which he endeavoured to make

out. A few seconds and he satisfied himself that the muzzle was presenting to the right, and instantly he changed the course of his frantic charge and came rushing along the opposite side of the deck. As for his companions in villainy, they too came towards the stern at their fastest pace, and, scattering as much as the narrow space between the bulwarks would allow, charged upon the young Englishmen, careless of the presence of the gun which Hans Schlott had assured them was empty. And all the while Tyler and his solitary companion stood there awaiting the conflict with steady courage, but with the certain knowledge that on this occasion they would be beaten back. Holding their fire until Hans Schlott and his Dutch comrade were within a few yards, they levelled their weapons steadily, and at a word from Tyler firmly pressed upon the trigger. Four times in succession did they discharge a bullet into the ranks of the attackers, and on each occasion one of the Malay crew threw his arms into the night and came crashing to the deck. But in spite of their efforts to bring down the leaders, Hans Schlott and Christian van Sonerell still remained unharmed upon their feet, seeming by a miracle to escape the bullets intended for them. Determined to slay the two Englishmen who stood between them and the rich prize which had aroused their cupidity, and brave in the knowledge that they had nothing to fear from the gun, they came on without a pause, and before Tyler could have thought it possible were at the binnacle. At once down came Hans Schlott's cutlass, severing the tightly-stretched cable with such swiftness that it flew aside with a twang, while the weapon itself hit the planks beneath and penetrated deeply. A wrench, and the blade was withdrawn, while the Dutchman prepared to sever the second and only remaining barrier which stretched between him and the Englishmen.

"Stand aside!" shouted Tyler in warning tones, seeing that ere a minute had passed he and his companion would be overwhelmed. "They are massed in a body, and will be upon us

if we do not check them. Now, I will fire the gun, and dive overboard immediately afterwards."

"Fire!" bellowed John, as if to encourage his young leader. "Blow them all clear of the decks."

Swiftly placing the muzzle of his revolver against the top of the touch-hole, Tyler waited an instant to assure himself that his friend was clear of the discharge, and that the critical time had arrived. Then, steeling himself to the task, he pulled at the pistol, sending a livid flash against the breach of the gun. Fizz! The powder spluttered up in his face, giving out a column of dense smoke, which was swallowed up instantly by the sulphurous vapour which poured from the muzzle. There was a loud roar as the six-pounder spoke out into the night, and then, ere the echo had died down, and long before Hans Schlott and his accomplice could dart to the rear of the gun and fall upon the Englishmen, Tyler and John Marshall had sprung clear of the deck and were swimming through the deep water which surrounded the schooner.

"For the dinghy!" said Tyler as he came to the surface, shaking the salt water out of his eyes. "But silence, or they will learn where we are and fire into us."

"They are over the side, and will escape us," bellowed Hanns Schlott, peering over the bulwark in his endeavour to pierce the darkness. "Stand still, all of you, and hold your tongues, you men. Now, listen! Where are they?"

"Swimming for their dinghy or I am mistaken," said Christian van Sonerell with an oath. "She lies directly aft, where the tide has set her, and if we fire in that direction we shall blow them out of the craft. Here, get aboard our own boat some of you lads, and after the English pigs. Now, Hanns, level your pistols and let go."

The two Dutchmen at once leaned over the rail as far as they were able, and having judged what must be the position of the dinghy, fired together in that direction. But only the echoes from the neighbouring shore answered the reports, while the surface of the water, which had momentarily been

lit by the flash from their weapons, again disappeared in the gloom of the night.

"Missed!" growled Hanns Schlott. "It seems to me that we might as well expect to hit a fly under the circumstances. Let us not waste our time, but send a party after them at once. Fortunately we have a boat at our service, and can follow them. Take charge of the vessel while I go with our men and hunt down these Englishmen."

"Do so," answered his comrade faintly, for now that the excitement of the contest was gone he was beginning to feel the effect of his wound. "After them, Hanns, my friend, and do not rest till you have killed them; for remember that one of them witnessed the shot which killed their leader, while if that were not sufficient to bring us to the gallows, their evidence as to this act of piracy would certainly lead to the loss of our lives."

"I will hunt the island. I will follow as though they were rats upon whose extermination I am determined. Make your mind easy, Christian van Sonerell; this is a matter which concerns my safety perhaps more than your own, for I am the man who killed this Mr. Beverley. I will go to the end of the world to capture them, and when I have them in my hands, ah—!"

He clenched his fists in the darkness, and ground his teeth with rage. Then, realizing that if he was to have the smallest hope of success he must not delay, he turned swiftly about, and, forgetful of the throbbing pain in his head, which had followed John's lusty blow, went racing along the deck to the point where the boat was made fast. Already a crew of willing Malays were seated in it, and as soon as the bulky Dutchman had lowered himself into the bows, one of the former threw off the painter and sent the boat away from the schooner with a vigorous thrust from his foot.

"Pull!" shouted Hanns Schlott, using the Malay tongue. "An extra share of the prize if you lay hands upon these English dogs. Indeed, I myself will give a special reward to

anyone who is successful in killing them. Pull! Let us not waste time, for if we are swift we shall overtake them ere they reach the shore."

Dipping their long oars into the water, the crew of pirates sent the boat on her course, and within a few seconds she was well away from the schooner, with her nose directed for the island of Borneo. Meanwhile, what had happened to Tyler and his friend?

Once their heads had risen free of the water, they had turned towards the point where they imagined the dinghy would be, and after swimming a few strokes had the good fortune to come across her in the darkness. At once each grasped her by the gunwale, and hung on there while they prepared for the final effort of climbing in. Suddenly, however, an idea occurred to Tyler.

"No," he whispered, seeing that John was about to hoist himself up, "do not get into the boat yet awhile, for then we should be easy targets if they caught sight of us. Let us swim beside her, and push her away from the schooner."

"The very thing, sir! There's the painter, and now I've slipped it from the ring. I reckon that they will follow towards the shore, for what would take us in the direction of the open sea?"

"Then we'll do what they least expect," said Tyler sharply. "That way, John, and when we are a hundred yards from the ship let us lie still and listen. Then we shall learn what steps they are taking to capture us, and can make our plans accordingly."

Acting on this advice, they silently pushed the small craft out to sea, swimming with one hand in the water and the other grasping the gunwale. Soon they had put quite a respectable distance between themselves and their enemies, and at a jerk from Tyler, who back-watered with his feet, and so attracted his comrade's attention, they hung without a movement in the deep water, and listened eagerly for sounds of the pursuers.

"I heard pistols fired," said Tyler softly. "The sea was about my ears and deadened the sound, but for all that I am sure that they fired. Perhaps they thought that they saw us in the darkness, or, more likely, they let go their bullets in the hope of making a lucky shot."

"That's the case, I reckon," answered John. "But steady, sir, the sound of a voice carries far across the sea on a still night like this. Listen to that. They are in their boat, and are after us. I can hear that ruffian's voice."

Once again both were silent, while they turned their faces towards the shore and listened carefully. Yes, there could be no doubt about the matter, for Hanns Schlott's voice broke the stillness of the night as he urged his men at their oars.

"To the shore!" he shouted. "I will give a handful of dollars to the man who lays his fingers upon them dead or alive. Can anyone see or hear them?"

No answer was made to his question, though many eyes were staring into the darkness, and, therefore, without further delay they pulled on for the shore, hoping to capture the fugitives as they landed, or, if fortune were kind to them, to arrive on the shore of Borneo before the white men could reach it, and there lay a trap into which they would fall. As for Tyler and John Marshall, they clung to the frail boat for many minutes as she lay there motionless in the water, listening with all their ears for sounds of the pirates. So calm was the atmosphere, and so still the night, that, as the latter had remarked, the slightest sound travelled along the surface of the sea in a remarkable manner, and could be heard quite a distance away. Thanks to this fact, the splash of oars as the boat was rowed away from them reached their ears distinctly, as did also the hoarse commands of the Dutchman who accompanied the searchers as he gave the order to cease pulling. Then there was silence once more, and for many minutes the gentle lap of water against the frail sides of the dinghy could alone be heard.

"We will tire their patience out by remaining where we

are," whispered Tyler, "and fortunately for us the water is so warm that we are not likely to become chilled by remaining in it for a long period. Perhaps they will imagine that we have already landed, and in that case they will not venture to go far afield, for the night is too dark for pursuit. An hour or more of waiting may convince them that it is useless to remain, and as soon as they return to the schooner we will swim towards the land."

"And supposing they remain ashore till the morning?" asked John Marshall in anxious tones. "In that case we should certainly be taken, unless, of course, we waited for, say, a couple of hours and then pushed our boat away to the right or left, so as to land farther up or down the coast."

"It is a good idea, John," answered Tyler thoughtfully, "and if the pirates show signs of their determination to waylay us in the morning we will do as you say. For the present, however, I feel sure that we are acting for the best by lying quietly here. Our movements in the future must depend upon circumstances, though you may be sure of this, that whatever happens we will not be taken without a struggle. Unfortunately our weapons are practically useless, for the cartridges will have been destroyed by the water."

"I don't know so much," whispered John hastily, "for just as I was going overboard I thought of the matter and crammed a handful into my cap, while I jammed it firmly down upon my head. It's made of thick pilot cloth, and as I was only under the surface for a few seconds, it's possible that the ammunition has escaped. Look here!"

Pulling himself a little higher out of the water, he leaned his chin on the gunwale and gently drew his cap from his head. Then, one by one, he picked some twenty or more cartridges from the lining and placed them upon one of the seats.

"Not even damp," he said in low tones of delight. "Now, let's have the revolvers and place them here to dry. The

water will quickly drain away from them, and in half an hour or so they will be fit for use again."

Dragging their weapons from their belts or pockets, as the young boatswain had suggested, they placed them within the boat with open breeches and muzzles pointing downwards. Then, satisfied that they had done all that was possible, they once more turned their attention to the schooner, and to the pirates who had landed upon the shore.

"Hush!" whispered Tyler earnestly, some little time later, as a voice came reverberating across the water. "Someone is talking, and I think that it is the Dutchman."

"Sure enough, sir," agreed John, "and what's more, he's hailing the schooner. I wonder what he's saying!"

Both listened attentively, but owing to their ignorance of the Dutch language could make nothing of what they heard. That it was Hanns Schlott whose hail had come across the water, was evident, for both Tyler and John were well acquainted with the tones of his voice. Then someone shouted an answer back from the deck of the schooner, and again, in spite of the small knowledge that they had of Christian van Sonerell, they were certain that it was he who responded to his friend.

"There is some movement afoot," remarked Tyler, placing his lips as close to John's ear as their respective positions would allow. "And hark! there is someone moving ashore. Yes, I heard the boat splash as she was run into the water, and there is the clatter of oars."

Clinging there, with their heads just above the surface and their ears clear of the sea, both Tyler and his companion could hear the sounds as though they were made close at hand. Indeed, the calm sea, with its unruffled surface, seemed to accentuate the sounds and transmit them with such clearness that, though some hundreds of feet away, the noise of an oar falling into its place in the rowlock, and the splash as the blade was dipped, were heard as though close at hand. Then, at a word of command from Hanns Schlott, the boat shot

from the shore, and the sound of many oars forcing her through the water came to their ears.

"Going back to the schooner," whispered Tyler. "Have they given up the chase and decided to content themselves with the vessel as a prize, or are they merely returning there until the day dawns and allows them to carry on the pursuit with energy? We will wait and keep watch, and if there is no movement after an hour or more we will follow your plan."

"And what if they are just going aboard to get more men?" said John Marshall eagerly. "Yer see, sir, it's a long stretch of coast to set a watch on, and that Dutch rascal is cute enough to know it. Supposing that's his game, then we shall find escape more difficult still, and shall have to swim a good mile or more to get clear of the watchers."

"And when we touched the land we should never know whether we were beyond them or not," replied Tyler thoughtfully. "How many men do you think went ashore with Hanns Schlott?"

"Just about the number that come aboard with the other rascal, sir."

"And how many do you suppose are now aboard the schooner, John?"

"Ten at the most, and that's an outside figure," was the unhesitating answer. "I reckon that the Dutchman cleared off with his own fellows, leaving behind the crew which manned the schooner."

"Then we will change our plans, and for the present will decide not to go ashore," said Tyler resolutely. "If Hanns Schlott has come to fetch more men, as I feel sure he has, we will wait until he and the crew have reached the shore again. Then, John, my friend, we will float silently down upon the schooner, and will do our best to take possession of our property. We have arms at hand to help us, and if only we can effect a complete surprise we should be able to drive the pirates from the deck. Steady! The boat has

just reached the vessel, and by the sounds which come to us I feel sure that some of the crew are entering her."

That this was the case was quickly evident, for within a few minutes the splash of oars again sounded across the water, while the pirates' boat was pulled towards the shore, this time manned by more men than had accompanied her on her outward journey.

CHAPTER VI

Courage Wins the Day

FOR long did Tyler Richardson and his companion John Marshall maintain silence as they clung to the boat, for they were conscious that the slightest sound, even a gentle splash or hasty movement in the water, might declare their whereabouts to the pirates who still remained upon the schooner. Scarcely daring to breathe, they listened eagerly, and ere long had convinced themselves that Hanns Schlott had returned to the vessel for one purpose alone, and that was to obtain more men, whom he might place at intervals along that part of the coast of Borneo, there to wait for the landing of the Englishmen. Indeed, had there been any doubt in Tyler's mind, the squeaking of the oars and the more frequent splash of paddles told him at once that a greater number were in the boat on this occasion. Then, too, resting there as he did with his eyes on a level with the surface, the schooner every now and again became dimly silhouetted against the stars, and by peering steadily in her direction the feeble rays of the riding-lamp enabled him to distinguish some half-dozen figures which alone seemed to occupy the deck.

"Give Hanns Schlott and his rascals half an hour to reach the shore and separate," he whispered in John's ear. "Then we will float slowly down upon the schooner, and endeavour to make the boat fast. After that we will climb aboard and see how matters stand, though I am determined, whatever the odds, to regain possession of her."

An hour later silence had once more settled down upon the neighbourhood, and though the two young fellows had been

careful to listen all the while, nothing had occurred to arouse anxiety. Once Hanns Schlott and his boat-load of Malays had reached the shore there had been confused shouts and words of command, but these had quickly died down as the pirates separated and went to their stations. An occasional cry denoted the fact that they were still within hearing, but very soon they were silent, and once more stillness came over the sea.

"Now for the schooner!" whispered Tyler in tones which he endeavoured to steady; "come to the stern of the boat, John, and help me to shove her along. But first let us discuss our plans so that there shall be no confusion. We must make for our old position, and if it is possible we must contrive to load the six-pounder again. Otherwise there may be sufficient men aboard to rush upon us and sweep us into the sea."

"Not if we once get safely on her deck," answered John Marshall stubbornly. "It'll want more than the crew of Malays to turn us out, I reckon. Jest you take a bit of advice from me, Mr. Richardson, and when we get aboard go tooth and nail for those fellows. A rush, a few shots into their midst, and some hard knocks with our fists'll send 'em leaping overboard, and once that's the case we'll up anchor and away. Then our turn will come to talk to these Dutchmen, and Hanns Schlott and his comrade shall take our place. We'll turn the tables on 'em, sir, and do our best to capture 'em. But I'm under your orders, and ready to obey."

Having given vent to his feelings, the boatswain moved gently along the gunwale till he joined Tyler at the stern, when the two at once commenced to push the dinghy towards the schooner. With shoulders sunk beneath the surface, and finger-tips alone resting upon the edge of the boat, they urged her gently through the sea, halting every now and again to make sure that they were unobserved. At last they arrived close to their destination, and at once, at a nudge from Tyler, turned towards the stern.

"Now for the painter!" whispered the latter. "Remain where you are while I go for'ard. When you feel the boat shaking you will know that all is in readiness, and can creep along towards me."

A moment later he had disappeared in the darkness, and though his companion peered in the direction which he had taken he could see no sign of him. A gentle splash, however, told that he was moving, and ere long a sharp dip as the dinghy was pulled to one side told him that Tyler had been successful. At once the sailor commenced to move towards him, and soon found himself beside his leader and directly beneath the schooner's stern.

"We are in luck," whispered Tyler, placing his lips close to John's ears, "for one of the ropes which stretched from the binnacle, and was severed by Hanns Schlott, is trailing over the side and will help us to ascend. Here it is. Keep the tail of it in your hand while I swarm up, and be ready to follow immediately."

Without further explanation he thrust the end of the cable into his companion's hand, and then, grasping the other portion, slowly raised himself out of the water. Lifting one hand above the other, it was not long before his fingers lit upon the bulwarks, and at once relinquishing the rope, he clambered over on to the deck, where he was soon joined by John Marshall.

"Now let us lie down and listen," he whispered. "Then if anyone is about we shall get notice of their presence before they catch sight of us, and shall know how to act. If the decks are empty we will creep below and will see what can be done in the way of ammunition."

Crouching close to the bulwarks they lay for some five minutes without venturing to move, peering all the while into the darkness to discover, if possible, some trace of the Malays. But not a soul was to be seen, and though they left their hiding-place and crept into the bows, no trace could be found of the pirates.

"All sleeping below," whispered John Marshall with a chuckle, "and taking it easy after the fight. The Dutchman will be down in the cabin, occupying one of our bunks, for all the world as though he were owner of the vessel, but we'll turn him out in double-quick time and give him cause to regret the fact that he failed to set a watch. What's the next move, sir?"

"Remain on deck while I go below," answered Tyler promptly. "But wait, we have forgotten our revolvers, and must return for them. Slip along to the stern with me and I will drop into the dinghy and hand them up to you. That done, we shall feel more confidence, and shall have something with which to defend ourselves should the crew discover our presence. Now, stand by!"

Taking care to impart his orders in a whisper, Tyler quickly reached the stern and once more grasped the rope. Then, swinging himself over the rail, he lowered himself till his feet touched the water within a few inches of the dinghy. Groping in the darkness as he dangled there it was not long before his toe struck with a gentle tap against the gunwale, and at once he began to draw the boat towards him. A moment later he was safely on board, and had grasped the weapons for which he had returned. A glance above showed him John Marshall's figure stretching out towards him, and ere long the revolvers and the cartridges had been safely transferred.

"Load them," he said shortly, as soon as he had reached the deck once more. "That's right, and now we shall be ready for this Dutchman and his Malays. Come with me to the companion, John, and wait there while I descend. If you hear a suspicious sound, tap the deck gently with your foot so as to warn me, but whatever you do be careful not to raise a shout, for then they would know at once that we were on board."

Waiting only to make sure that the sailor understood his meaning, he stepped upon the ladder and descended rapidly. Arrived below, he lay down upon the floor of the cabin and

listened breathlessly, till the sound of heavy breathing from the farther end told him that Christian van Sonerell was sleeping there.

"Let him wait," murmured Tyler beneath his breath. "Once the gun is loaded and we are in readiness, we will drive him and those of the Malays who remain aboard into the sea, where they must swim for their lives. It is the only way in which we can deal with them, for if we endeavoured to make them prisoners by securing them down below we should never know what it was to enjoy a moment's peace until we fell in with friends, while we should run the risk of having our plans suddenly upset, and the tables turned upon us with a vengeance. Now for the magazine!"

Creeping across the floor it was not long before he arrived at the door in the bulkhead which gave admission to the cupboard in which the powder and shot carried by the schooner was stored. Fortunately he had failed to lock it on the previous evening, so that a gentle twist of the handle released the catch and allowed him to enter. After that he had no difficulty in obtaining what he wanted, for he had helped to place the ammunition in the cabin before leaving Singapore, and knew the exact position of the bags of powder and shot. Very soon he was outside the magazine once more, and having crept cautiously across the cabin, went staggering up the ladder bearing a couple of bags over each shoulder.

"To the stern!" he whispered, as John Marshall's face came into view, "and get ready to help me with the gun. After that we'll cut away the anchor and make ready to hoist the sail."

"It'll be a big job for the two of us alone," was the sailor's whispered answer. "But we can get a foresail on her at any rate, and that will take us out to sea. Give me hold of one of them bags, sir. They're a tidy weight, and want a little carrying."

Taking a couple of the sacks which contained the ammunition, he went softly along the deck with Tyler until

they had reached the stern, where their burdens were deposited beside the gun. Then silently, and with every precaution to avoid making a sound which would arouse the Malays, they crammed a charge of powder into the six-pounder, and rammed down upon it a couple of bags of grape. A piece of sacking over all helped to keep the bullets in position, and destroyed all chance of their rolling from the muzzle should it be found necessary to depress the weapon.

"And now for the anchor," said Tyler when the work had been completed to his satisfaction.

"Jest leave that to me," was the whispered answer. "I'll let it go for good and all by cutting the cable. It's lucky for us that we haven't a chain one aboard, for then we'd certainly have made a noise when freeing it. As for another anchor, there's a couple stowed away in the locker below."

Slipping to the stern-rail he quickly laid hold of the cable, and, drawing his knife from his pocket, severed it at one attempt. Then he rejoined Tyler, and as if to show his coolness, indeed, as if he already considered that the schooner had returned to the keeping of those who had a good right to her, and Tyler was his commander, he touched his hat briskly and asked what the next order might be.

"The sail," said Tyler shortly. "We'll hoist the foresail and leave the others till later. But we must show some canvas, for otherwise those fellows ashore will be after us with their boat, and, besides, we have to think of the prahu. But one thing at a time. Let us get the sail up and then discuss other matters. Now into the bows!"

Slipping along the deck once more, they passed the entrance to the cabin like ghosts, and halted for a few seconds to listen. Then, satisfied that Christian van Sonerell was sleeping peacefully, if a murderer and a pirate can do so at all, they crept on into the bows and at once set about hoisting the foresail. But here their difficulties were greater, for beneath them rested the Malays who were still aboard, men with the sharpest ears, and, moreover, sailors who slept but

lightly. That Tyler and his companion could hope to do all that they wished without discovery was almost impossible, and neither would be surprised to be disturbed in the midst of the work.

"Up with it now!" said Tyler quickly. "All is ready for hoisting, and if only we can get it in position we shall feel more secure. But I hear someone moving. Don't stop, but finish the job at once."

That someone had heard their steps above, or the clatter of a falling rope, quickly became evident, for as they tugged and strained, a head suddenly emerged from the hatchway leading to the men's quarters, while a pair of sleepy eyes peered round in the half-darkness.

"I heard sounds," murmured the man, while Tyler and John Marshall crouched motionless upon the deck. "A rope fell, and I even thought that I distinguished a step. But no one is about. We have driven the beggarly white men off the ship, and but for a few of us who are lucky to be left, all are gone ashore there to waylay the Englishmen. Perhaps our brothers have returned, and have not cared to awake us. It surely cannot be our enemies who have been bold enough to attempt to take the schooner!"

He scoffed at the thought, and hearing no sound to awake his suspicions, and seeing no sign of his comrades, he turned and began to descend. Suddenly, however, aided by the feeble rays from the swinging lantern, his eyes fell upon the two crouching figures, and for a moment he was dumbfounded with astonishment. Then he peered in their direction, and, suddenly coming to the conclusion that danger threatened, he slid below at his fastest pace, shouting so as to arouse his companions.

"The dogs are upon us!" he cried, rushing at the sleeping figures and shaking them fiercely. "Rise and prepare for fighting, for I tell you that the ship is taken, and that the Englishmen have returned."

"Impossible!" growled one of the Malays, sitting up and

rubbing his eyes. "Consider; they are but two, while there are seven of us in all, not counting our Dutch leader. You are mistaken, and have been suffering from a nightmare."

"Impossible, do you say?" was the heated answer. "I am not dreaming, and I say to you that unless you make a movement to protect yourself, you will quickly be killed. Ho, all of you! We are attacked! The ship is taken!"

Meanwhile Tyler and his comrade had been busily at work. Realizing that they still had a few moments before them while the native crew were aroused and informed of their presence, they threw themselves upon the sail, and by dint of tugging together at the rope managed to hoist it into position. Then they fled back to the stern and began to make preparations for defence.

"I can feel that we are under weigh," said Tyler, peering over the side. "That is capital, and now all that we have to do is to drive the crew overboard, and then clear away from the prahu. What course do you propose, John?"

"Along the island," was the emphatic answer. "Yer see, sir, we've the prahu to think about, and have to make our plans to get clear away from her as well as from Hans Schlott and his villains. If we had a couple or more men aboard to lend us their help we should be able to pile more sail upon her, but as it is, two will not be capable of doing the work, at least not in a hurry. Then those native boats sail like the wind, and would overtake us easily."

"Then your suggestion is that we should coast along the island, and if pursued by the prahu slip into some creek."

"Just so, sir; and what's more, we'll have to abandon the schooner, I expect, for otherwise they would be down upon us, and once our guns have been fired would easily capture us. Better to take to the swamps of the forest than have our throats cut by these rascals."

"Hush!" whispered Tyler at this moment, "Christian van Sonerell is coming up the ladder and the struggle will soon begin. We will wait until all have reached the deck, and then

we will call upon them to leave the vessel. If they refuse, or do not instantly obey, we will begin to fire amongst them, and I fancy that the contents of the six-pounder will help them to make up their minds. Stand ready!"

As he spoke, the faint gleams of the lamp which still burned in the rigging showed them the figure of the Dutchman standing in the companion-way, while directly afterwards the crew of Malays who had been left upon the schooner came climbing from their quarters, shouting in frightened voices to one another.

"What is this commotion?" demanded the Dutchman angrily, for he was annoyed at having his sleep disturbed. "You cry out like babies who have been hurt, and one would think that a boat-load of British sailors was about to board us. Go back to your quarters and let us rest at peace during the remainder of the night, for remember, we have had many hours of hard work, and I have a wound which troubles me."

Turning upon the Malays fiercely he shook his fist in their direction, and growled out the words in surly tones.

"But I tell you that we are attacked," cried one of the natives rushing up to him. "Only a few moments ago I saw two figures crouching in the bows. The lamp which swings aloft lit the dark corner in which they hid, and at once I recognized them as the hated white men. I tell you that we are attacked, that these Englishmen have climbed aboard while we in our foolishness slept, and have captured the schooner."

"Silence, idiot!" shouted Christian van Sonerell, stepping towards the man. "The vessel captured by the two fugitives! Why, if they have dared to come aboard it will be at the cost of their lives. Where are they? Point them out to me and I will soon show you who is the owner of this schooner."

"There is no need for you to be told where we are," called out Tyler at this instant, "for we are back in our old position, and while you slept have contrived to load the gun. It is crammed to the muzzle with bullets, and I will fire the charge

amongst you if you do not instantly leave. Overboard with every one of you! I give you five seconds in which to disappear."

Had a bomb-shell suddenly fallen at the feet of the Dutchman he could not have been more startled or more taken aback, for he had never dreamed that the fugitives would dare to return to the schooner. Indeed, he had taken it for granted that ere he awoke in the morning Hanns Schlott and the men who were with him would have laid hands upon them and killed them instantly. And now to be awakened suddenly, before the morning had dawned, and to come on deck to find that the Englishmen had returned, was a surprise, a piece of news which astounded him. At Tyler's words he started back as if he had been shot, while his face flushed with indignation and with rage at the commands which had been given.

"Leave the ship," he cried hoarsely, "and at the bidding of two who are little more than children! Their insolence astonishes me, and for the moment takes my breath away. Listen, you two. You have fallen into a trap, and had better relinquish your arms. Surrender at once and my men will bind you."

"Fire!" shouted Tyler, who had been carefully counting the seconds. "Empty your revolver amongst them!"

Levelling their weapons at the Malay crew, the two opened upon them without hesitation, a shriek and the thud of a falling body answering the first shot. Then a faint-hearted attempt was made to charge towards the stern, led by the burly Dutchman. But a lucky bullet happening to strike the leader, checked the natives almost instantly, and, realizing at once that they were no match for the two Englishmen, who had already shown how stubbornly they could fight, the natives ran towards the bulwarks and jumped overboard. As for Tyler and his companion, they sprang to the spot and discharged their weapons into the sea in the hope of hitting some of the fugitives, but without success. Then they turned to the prostrate figure of the Dutchman and closely inspected it.

"Dead!" said the former quietly, rolling Christian van Sonerell upon his back. "The bullet struck him fair between the eyes and must have killed him instantly."

"Then he is a lucky man," cried John Marshall, "for had he lived and escaped from the schooner he would, sooner or later, have come to the gallows for this act of piracy. As it is, Hanns Schlott alone is left, and we will hunt him down until he is captured and brought to justice."

"We will," agreed Tyler earnestly, "for remember, the Dutchman, who still lives, has his hands stained with the blood of our leader. You yourself witnessed the murder, and for that base crime he shall hang. I swear to hunt him down, for otherwise, if I relinquish the matter he will go unpunished, and will still continue to rob and murder in these seas. But this man is dead, and therefore had better be tossed overboard. Let us search his pockets and then do as I have said."

Kneeling beside the body of the Dutchman they rapidly ransacked his pockets, and having abstracted some papers and other objects of little importance, bore the lifeless figure to the side. Then with a heave they sent all that remained of Christian van Sonerell splashing into the sea.

"And now to set our course," said Tyler. "Go to the stern, John, and take the tiller, for you are a practised seaman, while I am little more than a novice. I will go into the bows and dowse the lamp, for it would never do to leave it hanging there. Then I shall creep below and search every corner of the vessel to see that none of the Malays remain. Just keep your ears and eyes open, my lad, for the shouting and the report of our revolvers must have been heard ashore by Hanns Schlott and his men, while those who plunged overboard will quickly reach the land, for these natives are excellent swimmers."

Waiting to see John Marshall go into the stern and grasp the tiller, he felt for the line by which the riding-lamp was hoisted and rapidly lowered it to the deck. Then he took it in his hand and descended into the cabin. Here, as he fully

expected, he found everything in confusion. Pillows and blankets lay scattered upon the floor where the Malays had tossed them when searching the bunks for valuables. The table which had stood in the centre lay crushed and shapeless in one corner, while the pistol with which the murderer had slain Mr. Beverley was half-hidden beneath it. As for the latter, there was no sign of his body, and it became evident at once that, as in the case of those who had lost their lives during the struggle on the deck, it had been committed to the sea.

"Perhaps it is better so," murmured Tyler, "for had I seen him here lying murdered in his bunk the sight could only have shocked and distressed me. I know that he is dead, for John actually witnessed the deed. That being the case, I have but one duty to accomplish, and that is to bring Hanns Schlott to justice. And now for the other parts of the schooner."

Passing into the bows, he peered closely into every corner, opening the lockers lest one of the Malays should be concealed on board. Then, satisfied that he and John were alone on the vessel, and that they were in command once more, he dowsed the light and clambered to the deck.

"They're hollering fit to hurt themselves," said John with a chuckle, "and I reckon that Hanns Schlott is jest silly with rage. He's calling his men together, and I've no doubt that they'll be putting off from the shore. But it's getting darker, as it often does a couple of hours before the dawn, and now that the light has gone from the rigging, and we have slipped away from our berth, he'll have a precious hard job to find us. But that foresail don't send us along more than a couple of knots an hour, and when the sun comes up we shall be still in sight of the prahu. Then them pirates will come swooping down upon us, and we shall have to make for the shore."

"Then we'll try to hit upon a river," said Tyler. "I had many a chat with Mr. Beverley on our way out from England, and together we went over the maps and charts dealing with

the island of Borneo. He told me that there were numerous bays along the coast-line, and that one or more rivers ran into them as a rule. In fact in some parts the shore is a swamp in which trees abound, and through which navigation is sometimes possible. It may turn out that we shall have the fortune to strike an opening which will allow us to sail some way into the interior, for the water-ways are wide, and it is fairly certain that a ship can penetrate many miles from the coast. After that a boat would be necessary, for there are shallows higher up. But until the day breaks we can make no plans, and as it is pretty certain that we shall be seen and followed by Hanns Schlott and the crew of the prahu, it will be well if we make preparations to resist them. Stay where you are, John, while I get out some ammunition and load the gun. We'll leave the six-pounder in the stern loaded with grape, while we'll put a ball into the one right for'ard."

Once more the two young fellows parted company, John Marshall to stand at the helm and listen to the shouts which came from the shore, while Tyler promptly set about loading the gun which stood in the bows. That done, he brought from below a supply of muskets and ammunition, and having prepared them, placed them at intervals along the deck.

"And now for something to eat," he said to himself. "John and I have been at work for many hours, and the fighting and the excitement of this business have given me an appetite. It seems to me that we should be foolish to neglect this opportunity of eating, for once the day comes our attention will be fully occupied with the pirates. I'll just see what is to be found in the lockers."

Lighting the lamp once more, he went to that portion of the schooner where a supply of food and drink was kept, and quickly went swarming up on deck with some slices of ham, a few biscuits, and a couple of bottles of beer.

"Jest the thing!" exclaimed John Marshall, allowing a broad grin of pleasure to overspread his features. "Jest what I wanted; and hang me! now that the food's before me, I

remember that I'm as hungry as can be. Share and share alike, sir, and make no enemies. Here's a corkscrew in my knife, and there's a blade as well if we want it."

Seating themselves upon the deck, Tyler and his companion fell upon the good things with eagerness, washing down the dry biscuit and ham with a bottle of beer. Then they chatted in low tones, John occasionally rising to his feet to make sure that the sound of breakers as the sea washed upon the shore was no nearer. Occasionally a faint shout came to them across the water, and once they heard the splash of oars; but very quickly all signs of the enemy disappeared, and they floated along, for all they knew, alone in that portion of the world. Indeed, the fact that they had beaten back the pirates and regained possession of the vessel, and that Hans Schlott and his Malays had for the moment disappeared from their view, raised their spirits to the highest, so much so that they joked and laughed there as they crouched upon the deck. And who could blame them, in spite of the fact that they had so recently lost their leader? For their escape had been wonderful, and the relief to their minds was great. Reviewing the events of the night as he sat there beside John Marshall, Tyler could not suppress the feeling of elation with which he was filled. Everything had been so sudden, and almost unexpected. The death of Mr. Beverley, the advent of the boat-load of pirates, and the desperate struggle which followed had come with such startling swiftness that his mind was still in a whirl, while his thoughts were so full of the narrow escape which they had had, and of plans for the future, that his brain was as yet incapable of appreciating to the full the loss which he had suffered. Vaguely he mourned the death of a man who had been a good friend to him, and in his quiet and determined manner he decided that, once he could see his way to following Hans Schlott, he would do so with all the energy of which he was capable. But for the present he and the boatswain were fugitives themselves, while the rascally Dutchman and his crew of Malays were the pur-

suers. How could they contrive to escape from the prahu, and if they were forced to take refuge on the island, how would they ever be able to communicate with their friends?

"We must make as complete preparations for an extensive journey across the island as we possibly can," said Tyler, breaking the silence which had been maintained between the two for almost an hour. "You see, Mr. Beverley's intention was to land upon the coast somewhere hereabouts, and then to strike for the interior. His object was partly to obtain particulars as to the productiveness and mineral value of Borneo, and partly to hunt for rubber, which is becoming very rare, and which always obtains a high price in European markets. He equipped himself with all manner of articles, and though we cannot hope to carry much with us, we can at least take what will be most necessary for our safety."

"Guns, for instance!" exclaimed John Marshall shortly. "I reckon that our revolvers, a fowling-piece, and a rifle, with the necessary ammunition, will be far more useful to us than anything else. For food we can rely upon our weapons, and after that what else do we want?"

"Strong boots and clothes, I should say," replied Tyler swiftly. "Mr. Beverley told me that rain is to be expected daily in the island, and that the journey would take us through the thickest forests and deep swamps. Obviously, then, it will be well to look carefully to our clothes, and assure ourselves that we are well provided in that respect."

"And what about the schooner?" John ventured to demand. "You won't desert her and leave her for the use of Hans Schlott?"

"Certainly not. Once it becomes clear that we must abandon our ship we will sink her or burn her, whichever is easiest. Then we can get ashore in the dinghy, and once in the swamps I think we shall be able to laugh at the pirates. But then there will be the natives to be considered, and in their case we must hope for the best."

"Quite so, sir," agreed the boatswain; "and as to getting

rid of the ship, I vote that we sink her, for we can see to the necessary arrangements now, and once the day comes shall feel that we have all in readiness. There's a double-handed augur in my locker, and some chips of wood which will act as plugs, and which we can knock out of the holes once the time arrives for sinking the schooner. Lay hold of the tiller, sir, and leave the job to me."

Handing the ship into Tyler's care, he went off along the deck and disappeared below. Half an hour later, when he returned, it was with the information that he had bored sufficient holes to sink the schooner, and that a couple of minutes with a hammer would suffice to knock the plugs out.

"And now for our preparations for landing," said Tyler. "It looks to me as though we might expect the dawn to break at any moment, and I think that we ought to be particularly careful to have everything in readiness for instant flight. Take over the helm again, my lad, while I go below and get rid of this uniform, and put a pair of strong boots on my feet. When I come up I shall bring the weapons of which we spoke and a good supply of ammunition. Then you can follow my example, and make ready for a journey by land."

"Not forgetting a good hearty meal before we leave the schooner," cried the boatswain with a laugh. "By dawn we shall have been a couple of hours or more without a bite, and who can say when we shall be able to get our next supply of food? So let's go prepared in every way for a long journey and for rapid flight."

Hastily agreeing to this suggestion, Tyler once more dived into the cabin of the schooner, and going to his own particular quarters commenced to don the suit of clothes which he had purchased at Singapore. A pair of thick boots and a strong felt hat completed his apparel; while a belt around his waist, in which was a strong sheathed knife, formed a convenient place in which to secure his revolvers.

"And now for a bag in which to carry ammunition," he said to himself. "I know that several were included in our

equipment, and I think that if we carried one over each shoulder they would prove of the greatest service to us, for then, besides taking powder and shot, we could carry with us some spare stockings. Also, I must not forget that uncivilized natives are particularly fond of cheap knick-knacks, and as we are nearly sure to come in contact with some of them, I will certainly carry a few scarves and looking-glasses with me. Of course, if the pursuit is very keen, we shall have to throw all these things away and retain our rifles only, but I hope it will not come to that; in fact, I have made up my mind that once it becomes clear that the prahu will overtake us if we remain at sea, I shall run in to the land as rapidly as possible so as to get a long start. But I must not waste time, for already the sky is getting lighter."

Bustling about in the depths of the schooner he quickly unearthed the various articles of which he had spoken, and rapidly made a selection. Then he came climbing to the deck, his arms loaded with weapons and ammunition. Half an hour later John Marshall had followed his young leader's example, and was dressed in the suit which Mr. Beverley was to have worn. Slinging the bags over their shoulders, the two carefully deposited in one of them an abundance of ammunition, which they had calculated should last them with ordinary care for a considerable period. Into the other each dropped a number of gaudy articles with which to please the eye of any of the Dyak tribes with whom they might come in contact. Weapons were now loaded, each of the young fellows selecting a rifle, while a light fowling-piece was placed near at hand, which they would take it in turns to carry. Feeling now that they had done all that was possible, they sat down upon the deck in their old position and waited for the morning. Nor was their patience destined to be severely tried, for hardly was their meal finished than the sky in the east broke suddenly, the dark clouds giving place to a bank of dull-gray vapour. Five minutes and the latter was tinged with a rosy hue, to change again to a glorious golden colour. Then up shot the

sun, and ere they could believe it, another eventful day was full upon them. Instantly both searched the coast-line of Borneo and the sea in every direction.

"The prahu," cried Tyler in startled tones, "and far closer to us than I should have wished! See, she has already sighted us, and is bearing down in our direction!"

"Then we must make for that bay," said the boatswain quietly. "It's a bit of luck that we have hit it off so nicely, for I reckon that with this wind we should reach the shore an hour ahead of the prahu. Over with the tiller, sir, and then leave the steering to me, while you go for'ard and train the six-pounder round upon her."

A minute later the schooner was headed directly for the opening of a narrow bay opposite which she happened to be as the day dawned, and through the waters of which she was soon plunging. Indeed it seemed as though she too desired to increase the distance between herself and the native prahu which followed, for she careened to her foresail, and, helped by the strong tide which was making into the bay, went shooting in through the entrance, and rounding a sharp promontory which jutted out into the sea and which had prevented a clear view of the shore beyond, headed straight for a narrow inlet which lay in front of her.

"A river!" exclaimed Tyler, with a shout of joy as he stood by the for'ard gun and swung the muzzle round till it presented out to sea. "A river, and to all appearance sufficiently wide to allow us to sail directly in, and so get clear of Hanns Schlott and his rascals. Once we are in fresh water, and out of their sight, we will look for a convenient landing-place, and then out shall come those plugs. Yes, if we cannot keep the schooner in our own hands she shall go to the bottom. Ah! the prahu has come into view again round that point of land, and as there is an abundance of ammunition below, I shall take a shot at her."

Carefully training the weapon upon the native prahu, he waited until she had drawn a little closer. Then with a

match he fired the powder and sent a ball hurtling in her direction.

"A good shot!" shouted John Marshall, glancing eagerly over his shoulder to see what success his young leader had had. "There goes the ball ricochetting across her bows. An inch or two to the left would have plumped it right aboard, for the elevation is just right. Try again, Mr. Richardson, for there is luck in even numbers."

Encouraged by the success of his first attempt, Tyler dived below and quickly returned with more ammunition; then with the greatest care he levelled the weapon a second time and fired, with the result that the ball struck the prahu heavily. Instantly a puff of smoke burst from her bows, and a shot came whizzing over the schooner, narrowly missing the mast.

"Two can play at the same game, that is evident," cried Tyler, undismayed by their narrow escape. "I will give them another shot or two, and then I fancy that it will be time for us to get ashore, for a well-aimed ball from the prahu might damage us severely and spoil our plans."

For the third time he trained the six-pounder upon the enemy, and, waiting for a moment till the muzzle of the gun covered the prahu, he sent a shot screeching in her direction. Crash! Even at that distance he could almost hear the missile strike upon her deck, and a keen glance showed him that the utmost confusion had resulted, for Malays could be seen rushing towards the spot, while a burly figure standing beside the tiller shook a fist furiously in the air. But whatever the damage done, it did not retard the course of the prahu. She came on at a rapid rate, her sails bellying out in the breeze, and her lee-rail awash with the water.

"It is high time that we made for the shore," exclaimed Tyler. "I see that we are now entering the river, and within five minutes we ought to be round the bend which hides the upper reaches. Keep at your post, John, and head her to the left. Then, the instant we are round the corner, bring her up into the wind and put the weapons in the dinghy. While you

are doing that I will go below, and as soon as I have knocked the plugs out of the holes we will say farewell to the schooner. Now, over with her!"

With a swing the vessel shot round the angle of land which seemed to bar the opening of the river, and having been allowed to run forward some two hundred yards, until hidden by a dense mass of forest trees which intervened between herself and the prahu, she was thrown with her head into the wind, which set her sail flapping loosely. With a twist of a rope attached to the bulwarks John Marshall secured the tiller in position, and at once commenced to carry out Tyler's orders. As for the latter, he ran below and, seizing the hammer, began to knock out the plugs which kept the schooner from sinking. At any other time, no doubt, he would have hesitated before doing such a thing, for the ship was not his own property, and to sacrifice her seemed almost an act of folly. But an instant's thought convinced him that it was the only thing that he could do, and therefore he set to at the work with the full knowledge that by sinking the ship he prevented her from falling into the hands of the pirates.

"That will soon send her to the bottom!" he exclaimed as he dragged the last plug from its position, and stood there watching some dozen columns of clear water spouting up into the hold. "And now to get ashore."

With one last glance around he ran to the ladder and quickly rejoined his companion. Then both hastily quitted the schooner, and, taking their places in the tiny dinghy, pulled for the shore.

CHAPTER VII

Flight across the Land

"WE will take it easy, for we have ample time in which to reach the trees," said Tyler calmly, as he and John Marshall pulled towards the land. "Once there, we will select a hiding-place and keep watch upon the schooner, and upon the prahu as soon as she rounds the bend. If, as seems more than likely, her boat is dropped and preparations are made to send a party in pursuit, we will steal off into the forest, using the utmost care to leave as few traces behind us as is possible. A few more strokes and we are there. Now out you get, John, and give me a hand to pull up the dinghy, for we will hide her amongst the bushes in case we should have need of her on a future occasion."

Waiting until the boat struck against the soft bank of mud at the mouth of the river, the two sprang ashore, and, lifting the dinghy bodily from the water, carried her up amongst the bushes. A hasty search soon discovered a mass of dense undergrowth, into the centre of which she was thrust.

"That should keep her from all prying eyes," remarked Tyler in tones of satisfaction, "while a cross on one of the trees near at hand will serve as a mark by which we shall be able to find her when we come this way again. Now for the bags and rifles, and afterwards we will turn our attention to the schooner, and to Hanns Schlott and his friends."

Slinging bags and weapons over their shoulders, Tyler and his companion left the dinghy in her hiding-place, and having marked an adjacent tree, returned to the bank of the river once more. There was the schooner with her head in the

wind and her sail flapping loudly. That she was deeper in the water both could see at once, while the manner in which she careened to one side told them that very soon she would sink to the bottom. As for the prahu, there was not a sign of her as yet, though distant shouts told clearly that she could not be far away.

"She will round the bend before the schooner goes down," said Tyler in tones of conviction, "and then Hanns Schlott will meet with another disappointment. I have no doubt that he has guessed our object in making for this river, and knows well that it is our intention to escape him by that means or by the land. But he will hardly have expected such complete preparations as we have made, and his anger will be great when he finds how we have hoodwinked him. But let us make up our minds in what direction we shall go. Shall we strike up along the banks of the river, or shall we turn to the south and west?"

"The last, sir," was John Marshall's emphatic answer, "for I reckon that if we made up the stream we should strike across creeks and smaller rivers running into the main channel, and should be constantly delayed. Besides this, Hanns Schlott and his fellows will have seen our dinghy, and will guess that we have rowed up stream in her, hoping in that way to escape them. That being the case, we must do exactly the opposite, and must go into the forest. Then, when the search is over or night falls, we can return to this spot and cross to the other side; for that, I take it, is our direction."

"Sarawak is the point for which we must aim, and, as you say, it lies south-west across the river," replied Tyler. "I happen to know that an Englishman, by name James Brooke, is there at this moment, and if we could only reach him we should be perfectly safe. But it is a long journey from here, and before we can hope to come across it we shall have to cover two hundred miles at least. However, I would far rather travel double that distance than fall into the hands of the pirates."

"The same here, sir," exclaimed his companion. "Like you, I'd face anything almost, for there will be little mercy if Hanns Schlott puts his fingers on us. But look up! Here's the prahu!"

Lying concealed amongst the trees, the two watched with beating hearts as the native craft swung round the bend and came into the river, and each noted with feelings of alarm, which they could not easily suppress, that her deck was covered with men. At her tiller stood Hanns Schlott, and, catching sight of the schooner, he at once directed the prahu towards her. Then shouts of exultation came across the water, and the Malays were seen preparing to throw themselves on board their prize the instant that they came up with her. It was pretty to watch the manner in which her lateen sails were dropped when well within reach of her prize, and at another time the fugitives would have admired the seamanlike way in which the operation was carried out, and Hanns Schlott's handling of the craft. But they had other and far more engrossing things to occupy their attention, and kept their eyes riveted upon the dusky Malays who swarmed upon her deck. Shooting up into the wind, just as the schooner had done before her, the prahu came to rest for a few moments. Then some twenty sweeps were shot out from her wooden sides, and like a gigantic caterpillar she came crawling towards her prize.

"Boarders prepare!" shouted the Dutchman in stentorian tones, "and remember the reward which I have offered. Take them alive or dead and it belongs to you. Lose them, and you shall know what it is to experience my anger."

With trained eye he steered the prahu for the schooner so that she glided alongside with a gentle grating sound, and then shouted again to his men.

"On board!" he cried, "and as they are not on deck search for them and drag them from below."

Instantly some thirty Malays sprang from the prahu on to

the planks of the sinking schooner, and, unsuspicious as yet of her condition, at once rushed for the steep ladder which gave access to the interior. Roused to the utmost eagerness at the prospect of slaying the two white-faces who had punished them so severely, and stimulated by the offer of a special reward, the men struggled to be first, and almost fell into the cabin, their shouts startling the peaceful scenery around. Hark, something is wrong, for a head appears at the opening, and a shriek of terror sets the air ringing. Then, like hunted beings, as if they were face to face with some horror which they were endeavouring to escape, the Malays came pouring up in a confused heap, this time struggling even more fiercely for the leadership.

"What is it?" shouted Hanns Schlott wrathfully, his desire to capture the fugitives and his anger preventing his seeing the sinking condition of the schooner. "Do you wish to tell me again that two boys have frightened you, and that you are flying from them? Back, hounds! and do not let me see you until you have reported that they are dead, or until you can say that they are gone from the ship."

"They would be fools to stay," called out one of the men who had descended, leaping with one big bound to the deck of the prahu, upon which he alighted with every sign of satisfaction. "The cabin is filled almost to the top with water, and in less time than I care to mention she will go to the bottom of the river. Hasten, comrades, or you will be dragged down to the depths with her."

With shouts and screams of rage and terror the Malays who still remained on the schooner came pouring up from below, their limbs dripping with the water, and all at once ran at their fastest pace to the rail, where, careless of the space which now intervened between themselves and the prahu, they sprang outwards in their desire to escape from the sinking vessel. Some, more fortunate than their fellows, reached their comrades in safety, and, turning swiftly about, looked back at the schooner with eyes which bulged from their sockets, so

great was their alarm and consternation at the trap into which they had fallen. A few, however, who had been unable to reach the deck before owing to the narrowness of the ladder and to the press of men, found that the jar with which the prahu had hit against her prize had caused her to sheer off into deeper water, leaving a gap which no one could hope to jump. For an instant they hesitated, and then with shrill cries of fright they plunged into the river, and went clambering into their own ship by means of the sweeps which hung overboard. As for Hanns Schlott, he was like a madman. Rushing along the deck, he had at first thrown himself upon the Malay crew in his anger, and had buffeted those who had returned till they cowered at his feet. Then, suddenly realizing that he had been fooled for the second time, and that Tyler and his companion had been too clever for him, he danced between the masts as if his feelings were too much for him, and as if violent movement were necessary.

"A second time!" he cried in shrill tones of rage. "They have made me look foolish again, and I should have guessed their plot, and, leaving the schooner to her fate, should have landed and searched for them in the forest or upon the river. But it is not too late even now. I must not allow my vexation to master my reason, and I will at once see to it that they are followed. Listen!" he went on, turning fiercely upon the pirate crew; "the dogs have played a prank with us again, and have fled from this spot. Did anyone see a sign of the boat which was towed behind the schooner?"

For a few seconds there was silence as the Malays watched their comrades climbing on board. Then one of them, anxious perhaps to appease the anger of his leader, or drawing upon his imagination in his excitement, ran towards Hanns Schlott and bellowed some information into his ear.

"You ask for the small boat," he cried. "I saw it disappearing round the angle farther up, which hides the upper reaches. There you will find the fugitives rowing for their lives. Hasten! Send after them, and when you have cap-

tured them let them be punished for the trick which they have played upon us."

Without waiting to consider whether the report were a true one or not, and roused to a high pitch of anger and vexation by the manner in which he had been foiled, Hanns Schlott sprang upon the rail of the prahu, and, holding there to the rigging, stared towards the upper reaches of the river, shading his eyes with his broad palm, for the hour was an early one and the sun as yet but low in the heavens. Then he directed a swift glance to the schooner, as if a sudden suspicion had seized him that another trick was attempted, and that the fugitives were still in hiding there. But a moment's contemplation showed him that this could not be the case, for the sinking vessel lay wallowing in the river, which was slowly drifting her towards the bay outside. Already part of her deck was awash, while a trembling of her rigging, a curious fluttering of the sail, seemed to denote that her end was at hand. Indeed, as the Dutchman observed her, and endeavoured to make up his dull and heavy mind to the thought that she was alone, the schooner suddenly came to a stop in her gentle course towards the bay, then she heeled to starboard with such a jerk that her topmasts bent like fishing-rods and threatened to break away. Next second, however, she righted, and then her stern subsided beneath the water while her bows cocked high in the air. Down she went inch by inch, while those on board the prahu fixed their eyes upon her as if they were fascinated. Suddenly there was a low report, bubbles of air came seething up beside her, throwing the surface of the river into froth, and instantly the good ship disappeared from view, only one of her topmasts remaining above the river. But there was no great depth there, and ere a minute had passed she had struck upon the bottom, and, sousing forward on to a level keel, she came to a permanent rest with both topmasts elevated some twenty feet in the air.

"Out with the boat!" shouted Hanns Schlott as she foundered. "Let the crew get overboard at once and row for the

shore, there to search for traces of the fugitives, while we will sail up the river in the prahu and give chase. If they have escaped in that direction and we do not see them within half an hour we shall know that they have landed and hidden in the swamps, for our progress will be far more rapid than theirs. As for you other men, you are to search the bank of the river closely on this side, for it is obvious that they have not crossed to the opposite shore, for otherwise we should have seen them. If you find traces of their presence fire a gun to recall us, and we will come back to help you. Above all, should you see them, shoot them at once, for otherwise they may escape you."

"Evidently a big movement afoot," said Tyler in John's ear as the two kept watch upon the pirates. "They were nicely taken in over the schooner, but now they are going to take up the pursuit in earnest. Here comes a boat-load of the ruffians, while the prahu is already hoisting her sail to proceed up the river."

"Then what are we going to do?" demanded John Marshall in tones of anxiety. "If we remain here we shall nearly certainly be discovered, and I for one do not look forward to becoming a prisoner."

"There will be no making prisoners," was Tyler's short and expressive answer. "You must realize the fact that those men are the hounds who will hunt their quarry to the death. As for remaining here, it is out of the question, for though we have been very careful it was quite impossible to set foot upon the soft and muddy bank without leaving impressions behind us. These Malays are, no doubt, excellent trackers, for they have been accustomed to these forests and swamps all their lives. They will quickly discover our landing-place, and once that is done they will follow us. We must leave the spot at once if we wish to remain alive. Come, let us be going, and be careful to leave as few traces behind you as you can."

But now the prahu had dropped her boat into the water

and was standing up the river, while the crew who had been left behind were already putting out their paddles and preparing to row for the land. To have waited longer would have been foolhardy in the extreme, and therefore, without further delay, Tyler and his companion stole off into the forest. Soon they broke into a trot, Tyler being in advance, and this they kept up for half an hour, when the jungle thickened and made rapid progress impossible. Squeezing between gigantic tree trunks, at times crawling beneath tangled masses of creepers and undergrowth, they sped on their way, taking the utmost pains all the while to replace branches which had been pushed aside. With quick eye Tyler sought for the hardest grass, and led his companion over it. But soon it became evident that they were approaching a swamp, for the earth beneath their feet became soft and spongy, and within a hundred yards they were wading knee-deep through a mangrove swamp which seemed to stretch in every direction but the one from which they had just come,

"Halt!" cried Tyler, lifting his hand to warn his companion as a break in the trees denoted the fact that they had come across a creek or some arm of the river. "Let us listen so as to make sure that we are being followed. If that is the case we will swim across and continue our flight on the opposite side."

Throwing themselves down upon the long and twisted root of a durian which stood above the surface of the water, they sat there panting with their exertions, and listening eagerly for sounds of the Malays. Nor were they destined to be kept waiting long, for hardly had they regained their breath than shouts came echoing through the forest, while the snap of breaking branches, and the splash of many feet wading through the water, told that the pursuers were near at hand.

"They have quickly got upon our track," whispered Tyler, "and I fear that, after all, we shall have to fight for our lives. Now, how are we to get across the river without damaging our weapons?"

"Tie the ammunition on to our heads and swim with one hand, holding the guns above water. It ain't easy, I know, sir, but we've got to do it."

Hastily unslinging the bags in which the ammunition was stored, they placed them upon their heads, winding the slings round till the whole was secured. Then they pressed forward into the wide stream, which seemed to cut its course through the heart of the forest, and, waiting until the current almost carried them from their feet, commenced to swim for the opposite shore. As John Marshall had truly stated, it was no easy task which they had set themselves, for the ammunition, bearing upon their heads, made it difficult to keep their mouths clear of the water, while the gun, which was held at arm's-length above the surface, added to their trouble. But they were not to be easily beaten, and though already fatigued by their flight through the forest, they swam on gamely till their feet touched the opposite shore.

"Now for the forest and cover," said Tyler. "Then we will sit down to rest and watch our enemies. But I suppose that they will make nothing of the river, and once across will rapidly pick up our trail again."

"Then it's a case of fighting," was the boatswain's dogged reply. "If they're bound to come up with us what's the good of our tiring ourselves out by flight? Why not look out for a likely spot at once and get ready for 'em? With our rifles we ought to be able to kill a few of these Malay ruffians, and as we know that Hanns Schlott is not with them, but has gone on with the prahu, it is just possible that they may take fright and run for their lives."

Both were silent for some minutes as they waded into shallower water and disappeared within the forest; for the effort of pushing their way through the stagnant river, the creepers and weeds which abounded everywhere, demanded so much of their breath that they had none to spare for talking. However, a few minutes brought them to higher land, and both were about to dash forward and leave the water

when a thought suddenly occurred to Tyler, and with a quick movement of his hand he arrested John Marshall's progress.

"Hold on a bit!" he cried. "Do not move an inch nearer to the dry land or we may ruin all our chances. Listen to me, for an idea has suddenly crossed my mind, and it may mean the saving of our lives. Tell me, if we push on in the direction that we were going, would the Malays pick up our tracks?"

"Just as quick and as true as a blood-hound, I reckon," was the rapid answer, in tones which showed that the boatswain had no doubt of the matter.

"And how long would it be before they came up with us and forced us to fight?"

"Maybe half an hour, maybe less. It's jest a question of the denseness of the forest, sir; but it wouldn't be long, I know."

"Then supposing we do not climb on to the higher land. Supposing we wade through this shallow water, which will effectually hide our tracks, and, turning to the right, strike along the margin of the creek, and within this screen of trees. A mile of water should bring us to the river, when we must consider what is best to be done, though I have the feeling that we shall do well to return to the spot at which we started."

"Leaving these Malay blokes to push on in a dead straight line!" interposed the sailor with a chuckle. "I see yer meaning, sir, and I falls in with the plan right away. The success or failure of it will be settled within the next half-hour, for if our pursuers cross the creek and plunge on into the forest we shall know that all is well, for a time at any rate. What's more, I've a kind of a notion that we shall find it suit us well to fish out the dinghy and cross to the other shore of the main stream. Then their difficulties in following and in picking up our tracks will be so great that the chances are that they will give us up for lost."

"Not if Hanns Schlott still remains their leader," said Tyler with emphasis. "Do not forget that he is a vindictive man whose pride has been severely wounded, for on two occasions we have foiled him and made him look foolish. Then there is the other matter to consider. Murder in these seas may be of almost daily occurrence; indeed I believe I am right in saying that Borneo and the islands around are infested by pirates who fall upon any and every ship with the one object of plunder. Crews are ruthlessly slain and their bodies tossed into the sea. And when there are no ships to be attacked these pirates make for the shore, and, ascending one of the rivers, fall upon the peaceful tribes within, with the sole object again of obtaining booty and the heads of their enemies. But Mr. Beverley was an Englishman, and this Dutchman knows well that however apathetic the British Government may be with regard to the loss of native life, they will resent the murder of a countryman. The Dutchman will never feel secure till he has captured us, and I tell you now that he will follow us, even if our flight takes us right across the island."

"Then the sooner we push on the better," answered John Marshall in tones which showed that his leader's words had impressed him with a sense of their danger. "If this here scoundrel will follow us across the island it'll be well for us to obtain the longest start that is possible. I'm with yer, sir, and if you think that this plan is a good 'un, why, forward's the word."

That Tyler and his companion had been wise in coming to a halt ere they reached the higher land was evident, for had they rushed on through the swamp they could not have failed to leave impressions of their feet upon the soil. Then again, some yards beyond the belt of trees which fringed the edge of the creek the jungle became rapidly thicker, and passage through it would have been slow and difficult in the extreme, while it would have been impossible, in spite of every care, to traverse it without leaving abundant signs of their passage

behind. By keeping to the water, however, their course would carry them through a portion of the swamp where creepers and bushes were few and far between, and could be easily avoided. Indeed, there was little doubt that if ordinary caution were observed they could pass along beside the edge of the creek without leaving a single sign to aid the Malays. And what was more natural than that the latter, finding that the fugitives had sped in a direct course through the forest from the point at which they had landed, should plunge into the creek, and, gaining the opposite side, should continue in the same line themselves without suspecting the fact that another trick was being played upon them.

"That is what I think and hope that they will do," murmured Tyler, as he waded on through the swamp. "No doubt they will tell by the tracks which we have left on the opposite shore that we have but little start of them, and in their eagerness to come up with us and revenge themselves for the suffering which we have caused them they will rush on thoughtlessly and in hot-headed haste. While they do so we will keep within this belt of trees until we get close to the main river, where I fancy that our best plan will be to float down to the dinghy. Then we will cross to the opposite shore and take the road for Sarawak."

Anxiously did he and John Marshall listen for sounds of the enemy as they sped on through the water, and great was their relief when, happening to peep from their screen of trees, they caught sight of some dusky figures swimming across the creek, while others could be heard calling to their comrades from the forest into the depths of which the two fugitives had almost plunged.

"On the wrong scent for sure," whispered John Marshall. "I reckon them chaps is too bent upon laying their hands upon us to make full use of their senses, or otherwise they would have seen in a moment that we were fooling them. As it is, once they see through the game they will come

howling back to the edge of the creek, and then they'll be bothered."

"They'll find it difficult to make up their minds in which direction to follow," said Tyler with decision, "and I have little doubt that they will separate into two parties, which will go to right and left. If they do so it will make our task an easier one, for then, should they come up with us, we shall have fewer enemies to deal with. But do not let us waste time. Remember, John, that our safety depends upon the length of start which we obtain. Forward! And do not let us halt until we come upon the river."

With ammunition-bags still strapped to their heads, in case they should find it necessary to enter the creek again, they plunged on through the swamp, leaving a black trail of muddy water behind them. But there was no fear that the latter would betray them to the Malays, for scarcely had Tyler and his companion progressed a dozen yards than the thick mud settled upon the bottom again, leaving a clear surface above. At length, after traversing half a mile of the swamp, a break in the trees disclosed a wide stretch of water, while careful inspection showed them that they had arrived at the point where the creek entered the main stream, and where they, too, must alter their course.

"The orders, sir?" demanded the boatswain, as if a long swim were nothing to him. "Do we cross to the opposite side of the creek and make along to the dinghy by means of the shore? Or shall we jest give the river a turn? It's one and the same to me, though the first'll be the easiest."

"And the most dangerous course to follow," replied Tyler curtly, "for once we landed on the farther bank we should leave traces of our presence there, and sooner or later these Malays would pick them up. We shall be wise if we leave the land alone altogether, and take entirely to the water till we reach the southern shore of the river. Yes, that is my proposal; for if we return, by whatever route, to the dinghy, our pursuers will become acquainted with the fact, and,

besides, how are we to know that they have not already found and destroyed our boat?"

"Jest the thing I was about to mention, sir. And, what's more, how do we know that men have not been left in the sampan which brought these pirates from the prahu? Supposin' we was to drop down upon them, they'd raise such a shoutin' that every one of the dogs would come rushing down upon us."

For a time the prospect which had just been brought before him startled Tyler, for the Malays' boat had escaped his memory. But a little consideration showed him that to descend the river would be madness, for in all likelihood the craft lay moored off the shore, with a guard aboard her to protect her in case the fugitives should attempt her capture. And if men were there they would certainly find some means by which to attract the attention of their comrades away in the forest. A shout, the report of a gun, would go echoing along the swamp, and would soon acquaint the pursuers of the fact that their prize lay in a different direction; then back they would come, and once more Tyler and his companion would find themselves so closely pressed that they would have to consider the advisability of searching for the most suitable spot and making a stand. Yes, the dinghy was out of the question, and that being the case it was necessary at once to hit upon some other plan.

"There is no alternative," he said, suddenly turning upon the sailor, "and our way lies clear before us. We must now turn to the left and wade through the swamp beside the river until we have ascended sufficiently far to make it certain that, while venturing to swim across, we should not drift down as far as the mouth."

"Then the angle, or jest above it, will be the spot, sir, for there the river narrows, and while the stream will run strongly below, above it will be pent up and there will be little flow. That should enable us to cross easily and without being seen. But steady! Ain't that the prahu?"

He pointed eagerly between the tree trunks to the open stretch of river, and there, swiftly coming into view, was the native craft which bore Hanns Schlott and his crew of desperadoes.

"Drawn the upper reaches blank," said Tyler, lowering his voice to a whisper, as though he were fearful that the ordinary tones would carry as far as the prahu. "It is clear that they have found no trace of us above, and are returning to rejoin their comrades. How angry their leader will be when he finds that they are baffled, and how fortunate it is for us that they have deserted the water above the bend!"

"Ay, it is that," was the emphatic answer, "for it was bothering me how we were to keep out o' sight of them chaps when crossing above the bend. Now they've jest played into our hands, and if we ain't successful, well, we ought to be."

With a vigorous shake of his head, and a hitch to the bag suspended about his shoulders, which had swung too far to the front owing to his active movements, the boatswain intimated to Tyler that he was ready to proceed, and instantly fell in behind his leader. It was nervous work wading through that swamp with the dull echo of splashing water reverberating amongst the trunks, for the sound which they made as they plodded forward seemed to their anxious ears so loud that those who were in pursuit of them would certainly hear. Then, too, the dread lest a clearing should suddenly bring them face to face with the Malays filled their minds, and caused them to halt every few minutes. But not a splash, not an answering sound, came back through the dreary forest, and but for the fact that they had full knowledge that Hanns Schlott and his crew were in the neighbourhood, they would have imagined that they were the only two human beings for miles around. But hark! Shouts from the mouth of the river attract their attention, while the sight of the prahu standing up-stream again causes them to crouch low in the water.

"Steering for the creek," whispered Tyler. "She is going

there to help our pursuers, and no doubt will soon clear up the mystery. Let us push on without a moment's delay."

Stimulated to greater exertions by the thought that the course of their flight was already discovered, and that even at that moment the pirates were following in hot haste, the two forgot their weariness, forgot the fact that their limbs ached with the effort of ploughing through the swamp and mud, and filled with the determination to make good their escape, they plunged forward as though they were incapable of experiencing fatigue. Then, too, convinced that any sounds which they might make would fail to reach the enemy, they crashed on at their fastest pace, without care or thought for the traces which they might leave behind them. Indeed they had already planned a clever ruse which had gained a long start. But both knew that ere many minutes had passed the lynx-like eyes of the searchers would discover some sign of the fugitives, and that done, to trace them would be a matter of no great difficulty, for their course could only take them through the swamp which lay at the margin of creek and river. Without pausing, therefore, to look back, Tyler and John Marshall trudged on and fought their way through the water till they reached a spot which was some little distance above the bend in the river which hid the upper reaches from the view of those who entered at the mouth. And here they came to a halt at the edge of the swamp and peered across at the opposite side.

"The current is sluggish, as you said," observed Tyler thoughtfully, "but the distance is greater than I had anticipated. It will be a long swim."

"But it has to be faced, sir, and we had best set about it at once. When all's said, it's little after what we have gone through."

"We shall do it, I have no doubt," was Tyler's reply, "but I was thinking of our weapons and of our kit. You see, this is a far longer swim and a far bigger crossing than we had to face at the creek, and even there I am bound to admit that I

felt done. The effort of holding a rifle in the air is by no means small."

"Then let's get something to float 'em on," said the boatswain suddenly. "Now that we've carried our packs so far we are not going to desert them without an effort, particularly the guns, for our lives depend upon 'em, do yer see, Mr. Richardson. Ain't there some sticks or something of that sort hereabouts upon which we could give them a lift to the opposite shore?"

"Sticks? Of course there are, and creepers in abundance," cried Tyler, leaping at the plan thus put before him. "John, you have a knowing head, and have been of the greatest help to me. Wait here while I see to the matter. I will get on to the dry land and out of this swamp, where I shall be able to obtain the materials which we want."

Not for a moment did Tyler allow the fact to escape him that it was necessary to blind their pursuers as much as possible and throw dust in their eyes. True, he and the sailor had dashed forward through the swamp at their topmost speed and without any great amount of care; but they had been particularly cautious when first they had turned from the direct course of their flight, and here, at the point where they were again about to make a break in the line, the necessity for thought occurred to him.

"We must not let them think that we have made across the river just here," he said to himself as he turned from his companion. "They must be led to imagine that we have pushed directly on, and as the river is wide at this point they will readily believe that we are still in the swamp. For that reason I will get to the dry strip of land beside the swamp by other means than by my feet. Ah, here is a likely tree!"

An overhanging branch caught his eye, and in a twinkling he had sprung at it and was swarming along. Arrived at the trunk he clambered round it till upon a second branch, which ran close to another tree, to which he was easily able to stretch. And thus, by making use of the fact that the monsters of the

forest were placed at close intervals, he contrived to land upon higher land at a considerable distance from the edge of the swamp. To draw his knife was the work of a moment only, and very soon a shower of creepers was being directed in John's direction. For the purpose of binding the materials together these were all that could be desired, but for the raft itself something entirely different was required. Fortunately a bank of thick reeds was at hand, and an armful soon fell to his blade. A second followed, while the first had already begun to assume shape and form at the touch of John's deft fingers. A third completed the supply, and at once Tyler swung himself into the same tree, and, swarming along to the others, finally came splashing into the water again.

"We have delayed long enough already," he said, as he stood there listening to distant shouts which came echoing through the forest, "and I think that it is high time that we waded in and set out for the opposite shore. Is all in readiness now?"

"All but the weapons, sir. We've to lash them to our raft, and then we can begin the swim as soon as we like. Your ammunition-bag, please, and now your rifle and revolvers. That's the sort, Mr. Richardson. Mine join yours, and this length of creeper fixes the lot properly. Now for the river, and I jest hope that that fellow Hanns Schlott and his covies won't get a sight of us."

"And I too," was Tyler's emphatic answer. "A very great deal depends upon our getting across unseen, and once there I propose that we take to our heels and run for all that we are worth, so as to put a good distance between ourselves and the pirates. Come, John, I will take my post at one side of the raft and will push with my left hand, while you use the opposite one."

Assuring themselves that their weapons were securely fastened to the upper surface of the reeds, and that the latter were of sufficient thickness to make it certain that the top would be above the surface of the water, they began to direct

their strange craft through the swamp, guiding it carefully amongst the trees. Soon they were at a point where the belt of jungle and swamp came to an end, and here they paused while Tyler waded out into the stream and looked carefully about him.

"All serene!" he called out gently, after looking to left and right; then, rejoining his companion, the two urged the raft into the river. Very soon they were out of their depth and were forced to swim, on this occasion finding the task of crossing to the opposite shore far easier than before. Indeed, now that they were freed of the dead-weight of the ammunition-bags, their progress seemed to be unusually rapid, and ere they could have expected it they were wading in shallow water once more.

"Off with the guns and shoulder the bag," said Tyler sharply, as they disappeared within the trees. "Now cut the creeper through and push the raft out into the open. Yes, that will do very well, for now that they are loose the reeds will become separated and will soon be washed out into the bay."

"Leaving Hanns Schlott and his men scratching their heads and jest puzzling where we've got to and how it is that we have disappeared so finely," laughed the boatswain, his spirits rising as the distance between himself and the pirates steadily increased. "And now, sir, which way? I reckon that we've got the whole of the northern portion of the island before us, and as that is a larger piece of country than we require, it seems to me that the best idea will be to set a course at once and follow it."

"Exactly so, John, but first of all we have to get out of this swamp on to dry land, and in doing so we must not forget that a trail may be left which will help the Malays to follow us. Just recollect the fact which I have mentioned before, that they are splendid trackers and thoroughly used to the country. That being the case, we must use the utmost caution, for our lives will undoubtedly depend upon our doing so.

Now let us look out for a likely tree, and then we will go through the same movements that I practised when obtaining the reeds on the opposite shore. Ah! this seems to me a suitable spot."

He pointed to the twisted, snake-like root of an enormous durian which, emerging from the earth, had shot out over the water for all the world like the branches higher up. About five feet from the surface of the swamp it was sufficiently flexible to be drawn within an inch or two of the water, and taking advantage of this fact, Tyler and John Marshall in turn threw their legs astride it and shuffled along to the shoreward end. Another branch here came to their aid, and ere many minutes had passed both were safely on dry land, with the satisfaction of feeling that however closely their enemies searched the fringe of trees which bordered the river they would find no trace of the fugitives. Then would commence a tedious hunt a few yards within the forest, and while that was in progress the white men would be speeding away. Yes, haste was of the utmost importance, and realizing this to the full, Tyler and his companion took to their heels, and, setting their faces towards the south-west, ran on in that direction with the understanding that as soon as they had placed some five miles between themselves and the pirates they would halt and settle the direction in which they were to march.

At length, breathless and exhausted after their exertions, for it was no light task to push through the forest at that rate, the two arrived at a part where the jungle was broken by a clearing, and, throwing themselves down upon the ground, waited there to rest. Scarcely had they recovered their breath and turned to one another to discuss the situation than a loud shout close at hand startled them, and in an instant they had sprung to their feet and faced about to meet the enemy.

CHAPTER VIII

Meeting the Dyaks

"MIAS! Mias!"

Suddenly the words, shouted at the top of a deep bass voice, broke the silence of the forest, and bursting from the trees near at hand came reverberating across the clearing, bringing Tyler and his comrade panting to their feet.

"Who is that? Can the Malays have already come up with us and be about to attack us?" demanded the former breathlessly. "Surely they cannot have discovered our whereabouts so soon, and those shouts must be produced by natives of these parts."

"It ain't the pirates, that I'll swear," responded John Marshall in startled tones. "Mias! That's how it sounded, and it seems to me, from what I know of the lingo of folks hereabout, that it was different to the Malay tongue. There, listen to that, sir; they're getting nearer."

"And will burst into this clearing before us," exclaimed Tyler in alarm. "Back into the trees and let us hide! Quick! for by the sound they are already almost upon us."

Unslinging their rifles as they ran, the two hastened across the clearing and dived with frantic eagerness in amongst the trees. Then once more they threw themselves full length upon the ground, and, peering from amongst the bushes and trailers which grew in luxuriance about them, stared out into the open. And all the while each wondered who it was who could have given vent to those shouts, and what was the meaning of them. To runaways attempting to escape as they were, the shouts came with startling suddenness, and even now their

hearts beat rapidly against their ribs, so great was the consternation that they had caused. However, a moment's reflection had been sufficient to assure Tyler that the Malays, with Hans Schlott at their head, could not have arrived upon the scene so quickly, and instantly he set to work imagining who it could be who had given vent to the words. Nor was he long kept waiting, for as he thrust his head still farther from behind the bushes in his eagerness to catch sight of any who might come, the shout again echoed amongst the trees, to be followed instantly by a sight which filled his mind with amazement.

"Mias! Mias!" The call came to his ears in the shrillest of tones, and was followed instantly by the crash of breaking branches. Then of a sudden something short and stout, and in the shape of a man, swung from a tree at the edge of the clearing, and went running across the open space in a half-crouching attitude, with the knuckles of its hands dragging upon the ground.

"An ape," exclaimed John Marshall in a whisper, "and a mighty big one too!"

"An orang-outang," corrected Tyler, staring at the animal. "I believe that they are very common in the island, and often grow to very large proportions. That one, for instance, is almost as big as a man. But what is happening? If he is being chased, like ourselves, why does he not rush to the other side of the clearing and get away in that direction?"

"Because he can't. Because there's natives over there, natives all round him. He's brought to bay, and he's got to fight for his life, poor beggar!"

"And will give some trouble before he is defeated. Look! he has seized a branch and means to use it as a cudgel, just as if he were a human being. But listen. There is the shout again."

Scarcely had the words left Tyler's lips than the curious call again awoke the echoes of the forest, and had barely died down when some dozen dusky figures suddenly emerged into

the clearing from opposite directions and advanced upon the threatening figure, which now occupied a central point. Crash! The animal raised his cudgel at the sight of his enemies, and brought it to the ground furiously and with such force that it was a wonder that it was not broken into a hundred pieces. Then, as if the sight of the natives aroused his anger beyond everything, the ape came running to meet those who were nearest to him, his body now held fully erect. With glaring eyes and wide-open mouth, which exposed a row of terrible fangs, he ran with silent feet towards his enemies, snarling in his rage. Then, singling out one in particular, he leapt at him with unexpected suddenness, and, throwing his cudgel to the ground, gripped the unfortunate fellow in his arms.

"Look! He will kill him! The brute has caught the poor fellow's arm between his teeth, and I heard the bone crack!" cried Tyler, unconsciously raising his voice in his excitement at the scene. "Ah! the others are afraid. They are hanging back, and will desert their comrade. We must help, for we cannot lie here and see a human being killed before our eyes by such a hideous brute. Your rifle, John! Quick! out into the open!"

Almost before the boatswain had grasped his meaning, Tyler was on his feet and running between the trees at his fastest pace, and ere John Marshall could rise to follow him his leader was within a few yards of the ape. As for the natives, one more courageous than his comrades had thrust at the savage animal with a spear, and had left the weapon sticking in his back. But he might just as well have used a thorn from a neighbouring tree for all the effect it produced, for the mias did not seem to notice it, and, turning as the man dodged round him, went running towards him, still holding the unfortunate native between his teeth. And now the air was full of shouts of consternation as the natives dodged about their comrade. A few attempted to follow the example set by one of their brothers, but the gleaming fangs, the fierce snarl to which the animal gave vent as each approached, caused their

"HE SPRANG AT TYLER"

courage to vanish, and instead of throwing themselves upon the ape in a body, with the firm determination to rescue their unhappy friend, they darted farther away, and stood there brandishing their weapons and calling in frightened voices to one another. Imagine their amazement when a white man suddenly burst from the trees and rushed upon the scene!

"Out of the way!" shouted Tyler, as if the natives could understand him. "Now, be ready to help me should I fail in shooting the brute. John, come up on the opposite side and let him have a bullet from your gun also."

Stepping carefully towards the ape, Tyler advanced with outstretched weapon, prepared to raise it to his shoulder the instant that an opportunity presented of firing without injuring the man; but the ape seemed to guess at his intention, for, seeing another of his enemies approaching, he suddenly opened his mouth, and, relinquishing his grip of the arm, tossed the native to one side. Then, with another of those formidable and unexpected leaps he sprang at Tyler, alighting within a few feet of him. A terrible sight he was too, with enormous fangs exposed and his lip and nose wrinkled and contracted as he snarled. His small, ferrety eyes seemed to flash fire at the intruder, while each muscle of his enormous body stood out like a cord as he prepared for the attack. Indeed, so formidable was his appearance that our hero almost faltered and gave back. But the imminence of his peril, the fact that if he but turned his back for a moment the beast would be upon him, kept him with his face to the foe. And then his spirit, the fine courage which he undoubtedly possessed, and which had already stood him in such good stead, came to his help, and at once, levelling his weapon, he fired at the ape.

"Jump!" shouted John Marshall, seeing that the brute had failed to drop. "Out of the way, sir, or he will get you in his grip!"

Quickly though the warning was given, it came too late to save Tyler from the fury of this strange enemy, for, stung to madness by the pain of his wound, the mias gave vent to a

snarl of rage and leapt full upon our hero's shoulders. The brawny arms encircled the figure of the white man, and once more the capacious jaws opened in readiness to bite. A moment and the gleaming teeth would have closed upon the back of Tyler's neck, when John Marshall sprang to his aid, and, holding his fire for fear of killing his leader, thrust the muzzle of his weapon between the jaws. Then all three fell upon the ground and struggled there together, while the natives who had so unexpectedly arrived in the clearing looked on in utter amazement, incapable of giving help to those who had come so gallantly to the rescue.

"Hold it there! Keep your gun between his teeth for a little longer," shouted Tyler, with difficulty keeping his presence of mind. "My right hand is almost free, and very soon I shall be able to draw my revolver."

Putting out all his strength, he slowly drew the arm from the powerful grip which held it to his side, and then rapidly felt for a weapon. His fingers lit upon the butt of a revolver, and in a trice the muzzle was thrust against the hairy chest of his opponent. Bang! As the report rang out the lanky arms suddenly fell away, the jaws opened wide as if in another effort to tear the limbs of his white-faced enemy, and then with a sigh the terrible mias collapsed upon the ground, where he lay with arms and legs spread out in all directions. As for Tyler, he sprang to his feet with a cry of triumph, and, forgetful of the natives around, who as yet might prove to be enemies, he turned with extended hand to thank his companion.

"You saved my life, old friend," he said, in tones which showed his gratitude. "Had it not been for the fact that your weapon was thrust between his teeth he would have killed me; he would have gripped me in that awful mouth, and would have choked the life out of my body. I thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

"You're welcome, sir. I'd do the same every day of my life if you was to call for my help, for I tell yer, in this world

one good turn deserves another. Where would I ha' been if it hadn't been for you, I'd like to know. Jest washing about in the sea outside, I reckon, and food for the fishes. It was you, begging yer pardon, sir, who beat off them pirates, and if it hadn't been for yer quickness we should ha' been taken by Hans Schlott and his villains. So, yer see, we're even, and there ain't nothing more to be said about the matter. But what about these chaps here?"

He turned and pointed to the natives, who stood about them still in open-mouthed amazement, looking at the white men in speechless astonishment.

"We must make friends with them," was Tyler's instant answer. "We have suddenly come to their help, and they will surely be grateful. But first of all let us look at the poor fellow who was seized by the ape. I am afraid that he has been very seriously injured."

"He's dead, sir," responded John, stepping across to the body. "That bite would have been enough for most anyone, but I see the mias give him a squeeze just before he threw him to the ground, and I reckon it jest broke every rib in his body. He's dead, sure enough, and there's no use worrying longer about him. But about these chaps. There's another coming this way, and what's more, he's a Chinaman."

"Then he may understand our language," burst in Tyler, for he had learnt from Mr. Beverley that the island of Borneo contained many of the race, who frequently sailed there after residence at Singapore. "Call him here, John, and let us attempt to talk with him."

Leaving the dead native lying upon the ground, and the enormous ape huddled in the centre of the clearing beside him, they walked towards the figure of a Chinaman who had emerged from the forest a few minutes before. As for the latter, he advanced towards them with a cry of delight and without the slightest sign of fear, and arriving within a yard of them, halted suddenly, and salaamed to them as if he realized at once that they were his masters.

"Li Sung him velly glad you comee," he said, with another of his curious bobs, which set his pigtail swaying. "Li Sung him comee along with natives and chase de mias. He reachee de edge of de forest in time to watchee de battle. Li Sung givee kow-tow. Him see velly great brave men before him."

"And you speak English," exclaimed Tyler with delight, "and will be able to show these friends of yours that we are not here to injure them. Who are they? And what do they do?"

"And where do they live?" added the boatswain suddenly. "Look here, Johnnie, my lad, we're in want of friends, and, what's more, our object is to get as far away from here as possible, for, like the mias, we are chased. A Dutchman and his cruel pirates are after us, and their prahu lies in the river beyond the trees."

"Den dey are our enemies as well," was the Chinaman's quick answer. "We livee a few miles on through de forest, and de tribe wid whom I workee am peaceful Dyaks. Dey sow de rice and work in de paddy-fields. But sometimes dese pirates comee deir way and den dey fight, for if not dey am killed and deir heads taken. Yes, de pirates am velly nasty men, and we hatee dem."

"Then the Dyak people with whom you live will befriend us," said Tyler. "Talk to them and tell them who we are, and why it is that we are here. Say that we will do them no harm, but in return for the help which we have given them just now we will ask them to shelter us for a time until we can proceed on our journey to Sarawak."

"You go dere?" cried Li Sung eagerly, pricking up his ears at the mention of Sarawak. "Den me comee too, for Li Sung havee wifee in Sarawak. But me talkee to de natives."

He went off at once to do Tyler's bidding, while the latter conversed in low tones with his companion.

"We are in luck," said Tyler, sitting upon the ground, for, now that the excitement was over, he was feeling fatigued and

somewhat shaken after his struggle with the ape. "It seems that Li Sung, this Chinaman, also wishes to make for Sarawak, and we will most gladly take him with us, for it is clear that he has some acquaintance with the country, and in addition can speak the language of these Dyaks, a fact which will be of the utmost value to us. It is evident that he is pointing out to the natives what we have done for them, and I could see when he was talking to us that his bobs and kow-towing impressed them with an idea of our importance. Nothing could be better for us, for the more they respect us the safer we shall be. But here he comes again, and I see that he is bringing the natives with him."

"Li Sung him say allee dat you tellee him," began the Chinaman, "and de natives ask you to stop wid dem. Dat was deir chief," and the Chinaman pointed to the unfortunate Dyak who had fallen a victim to the ferocity of the ape, "and dey ask dat you takee his place. Dey also say dat dis Dutchman has fought dem before, and coming upon dem suddenly has killed many of deir comrades. Den he has sailed away, taking de wives and children with him as slaves. He will follow you, dat is for sure, and dese people will have to fight. Dey ask, den, dat you place yourself at deir head and lead dem, for in attacking de mias allee alone you have shown dat you am brave and strong."

Once more the pigtail swung from side to side while the Chinaman kow-towed to Tyler. Then he stood erect again, and with outstretched hands repeated his message.

"Helpee dem," he pleaded, "and dey will drive dis Dutchman back. Refuse, and all whom you see here will die, while deir homes will be broken up. Dose dey care for will become slaves, and will be taken miles and miles away among strange people, while dose who are left with deir lives will find deir crops ruined and deir fruit-trees, upon which dey feed far more dan upon de rice, cut to the ground."

"Their chief!" exclaimed Tyler in astonishment. "You

may tell them, Li Sung, that I will take the place for a time, but they must understand that at the first opportunity I shall leave for Sarawak. But we cannot discuss the matter here, and therefore I suggest that we march at once for their village. Lead the way and we will follow."

With a sharp bob and a shake of his pigtail the Chinaman showed that he understood the order and fully agreed with it. Then he turned about, and, shouting some words to the Dyaks, led the way into the forest. As for the latter, they ran to the centre of the clearing, and while a few lifted the body of their comrade and commenced to carry him away, the remainder hastily searched for a suitable bough and made preparations to remove the mias. A couple of lengths of creeper at once filled the place of ropes with which to bind the wrists and ankles of the animal together. Then a long stout bough was thrust between them, and three men attached themselves to either end. At a given signal they lifted their burden, and, resting the pole upon their shoulders, went staggering off towards the forest. As for Tyler and John Marshall, they fell in behind and trudged along, their minds so full of the turn which events had taken, and of the strange and unexpected manner in which they had fallen amongst friends, that conversation was impossible.

Very soon the procession came to a path which had evidently been trodden by many feet, and turning along this they pushed their way through a belt of forest which would have been impracticable had it not been for the fact that the hand of man had been at work clearing the undergrowth. On every hand enormous giants reared their leafy heads into the air, for the most part ascending some fifty feet or more before giving out a branch, while, crowded in between them, trailing this way and that in fantastic festoons, and embracing their more powerful brothers as if to protect them or to obtain support from their strength, were long creepers, with leaves of the most delicate and vivid green.

"And look at the flowers," said Tyler, who now for the

first time was able to take note of his surroundings, and observe the beauties of the island of Borneo. "Whenever we happen to come upon a spot where the trees stand back and permit the rays of the sun to penetrate, orchids and other tropical blooms can be seen in profusion, dangling often from the tree tops."

"Yes, and there are palms, sir, and won't we jest enjoy them," was the sailor's reply as he pointed to several of that variety. "Nothing like cocoa-nuts to quench the thirst on a boiling hot day."

"And evidently the natives believe in them, John, for you can see that they have erected bamboo ladders against some of the trees, and have settled their abode in the midst of a plantation. Now how will they receive us, I wonder?"

By now they had come to a break in the forest path, and the trees suddenly ceased to spring up on either side. A glance at once showed that the woodman's axe had been busy here, and had kept the jungle at bay. Large areas of flat and open ground were to be seen, and all under cultivation; while farther on, a plantation of palms and abundant fruit-trees overhung an enormous house, around which swarmed numerous natives.

"The village!" exclaimed Tyler. "Seeing that long hut reminds me that Mr. Beverley told me that these Dyaks seldom have separate establishments for their families, but prefer to live under the same roof. In fact, some of their residences harbour five hundred people, and are some hundreds of feet in length. But here we are, and now I suppose that there will be a talk."

Reassured by the friendly glances of the natives, and by the words of the Chinaman, who had now rejoined them, the two young fellows marched up to the village hut with heads in the air and a smile upon their lips. But all the while their senses were fully alert, for they had heard before now of treachery, and it was well to be prepared. However, there was no need for alarm, for scarcely had they reached the steep

ladder which led to the living floor than a number of women appeared bearing food for them.

"If de Englishmen will be seated deir wants will be looked to," said Li Sung, again kow-towing, a sign of respect which the Dyaks at once imitated. "Li Sung can assure dem dat dere is noding to fear, for dese men am velly friendly. Dey have seen de brave act which was meant to save de life of a comrade, and they are for ever in the debt of deir visitors. But dey bid you hasten, for if dere am evil men who hunt for you, it will not do to sitee long at food. After you have eaten we will talkee, and my master shall say what course it will be wise to follow."

"Then we shall be ready very soon, Li Sung, for we have no wish to fall into the clutches of the Dutchman. In five minutes we shall be ready, and you can bring the chief men along. Now bring the food."

With a wave of his hand the Chinaman bade the Dyak women come forward with their trays, and soon the two fugitives were indulging in an excellent meal.

"It beats everything," exclaimed John Marshall with enthusiasm as he settled himself to do justice to the repast. "An hour ago we were flying who knows where, and wondering whether we should escape with our lives. And now we suddenly find ourselves in proper trim, with victuals and drink to spare!"

"But with a great deal before us," interrupted Tyler thoughtfully, staring hard at the ground as though that would help him to decide what their next step was to be. "We have an enemy to think of, John, and sitting here will not save us from him. I am wondering what chance these Dyaks would have against Hanns Schlott, for, as you see, they are but rudely armed, and have not a single firearm amongst them. It seems to me that it will be better for them, perhaps better for us also, if we agree to part company at once, for otherwise we shall be the cause of their getting into trouble."

"And if we leave they will still have to meet the Dutch-

man," said the boatswain swiftly. "I say that this Hans Schlott will come this way once his trackers have got on our line, and, remembering that there are Dyaks in the neighbourhood, will make a raid upon them. The rascal makes his living by piracy, and when that fails he takes slaves and gets money by them. So he'll attack 'em, and it'll not make so much as a farthing's difference if we remain or not."

"De words am true," broke in the voice of Li Sung at this moment. "My massa, Li havee already said dat dis captain of de prahu am known to us. A year has passed since he sailed into de river, but we havee not forgotten. See dere. De trees are but sprouting from de ground, and if we had not had others to draw from elsewhere we should have starved."

He pointed to a portion of the plantation where numerous stumps protruded from amongst the vegetation.

"Yes, dere are de remains of de fruit-trees," continued Li Sung, "and deir loss was almost as bitter as de theft of de wives and children. Massa, de men here am in terror. Were dey to knowee all dat you havee told me dey would fly velly quick, for dis Dutchman am a monster in deir eyes. But here am de chiefs, and we will talkee wid dem."

He beckoned to a number of natives who had squatted near at hand, and at the signal they ascended the ladder and sat down before Tyler with an air of gravity which showed that if they were not fully aware of the close proximity of the pirates they were for all that fearful of some impending danger.

"Tell the white man that we are his children," said their spokesman, addressing his words to Li Sung, who at once interpreted them. "From the moment when he dashed into the clearing and faced the mias in the hope of rescuing our young chief we were his friends for life. And now that we are without a leader we ask him to fill the place, at least for a time. Say also that we have heard enough to show us that the pirates are near, and that if he and his friend leave us we shall certainly fall victims. Would that we could change our

home, for the soil is now past the work we demand of it, and more of the jungle must be cleared. Then, again, our lives are never safe while we remain near the river, while the mias, tribes of which inhabit the forests near at hand, rob our trees of their fruit, and make their cultivation hopeless. We are dispirited, and now a new misfortune is upon us."

"Change their home! The soil is worked out, and misfortunes constantly coming!" murmured Tyler as if to himself, while his eyes roamed round the circle of Dyaks, "Why not change their abode? Why not come to Sarawak with us and there have peace and safety under the Englishman?"

Unconsciously he said the words aloud, so that John Marshall overheard them, and instantly the latter's features brightened with a smile, while he turned with unusual eagerness to his young leader.

"I know somethin' about these here Dyaks and the China boys," he said, "for away in Singapore one met plenty of the last who had been to Borneo, and who told the tale that the tribes often wander in search of new fields for cultivation. Yer see, a couple of seasons work the nourishment out of the soil, so that it jest refuses to give good value for the labour expended on it. Then the Dyaks pack up their goods and jest march right away till they come to a likely neighbourhood. Having settled upon their new home they set to work to cut down the jungle, and then to lay out their crops. As for a house, it is nothing to build, and takes little more than a week, for you can see for yourself that the materials are close at hand, and everything jest done to last a short time only. Then, too, they've got to think of enemies, and I've heard it said that everyone is against these poor helpless people. They ain't got no firearms as a general rule, and I reckon they're at anyone's mercy. Now if we was to lead them, and, after beating back this Hanns Schlott and his fellows, to march with the whole lot to Sarawak, we should be doing them a good turn, while their company would make our journey all the more secure."

"And at the end we should bring them under the protection of James Brooke of Sarawak," added Tyler. "Mr. Beverley, who was an admirer of that pioneer, told me that the latter's chief aim and object in coming to Borneo, and in settling at Sarawak, was to look after the interests of the unfortunate Dyaks, who are fleeced, and murdered, and taken into slavery by powerful gangs of pirates composed of Malays and sea-coast Dyaks as well. Their lot, indeed, is a very hard one, and by persuading these people here to join us in our journey we should be doing them no harm. Indeed we should be conferring a benefit upon them. I admit that the journey is a long one, but then a brighter prospect will be before them at the end. But let us put the suggestion to them, when they can consider it for themselves. Listen," he went on, addressing himself to the Chinaman, "my friend and I will do what we can to lead you and protect you, and it has occurred to us that if these people here are considering a move, and above all, if by remaining here they are to run the danger of constant attack at the hands of the pirates, it would be better for them to go far away and leave this neighbourhood altogether. We are bound for Sarawak, where James Brooke has made his home, and is fighting to bring peace to the natives. Ask them whether they would care to make the journey with us, and find their new home in the place that I have spoken of."

Leaning back against the wall of the native hut, Tyler watched the faces of the Dyak tribesmen as the proposition was put before them, and noted the eagerness with which they listened to Li Sung's words. That they were impressed by the proposal became quickly evident, for at once they began to discuss the matter with every sign of interest, and, conscious that upon their decision the fate of their comrades would depend, they promptly called to those who stood about them to join in their council.

"But we must not forget the pirates," said their leader, arresting the conversation for a moment. "I have already

placed a few men in the forest to keep watch, but now I will send others to the bank of the river there to spy upon their movements. Then if this Dutchman comes in this direction we shall have warning of the fact, and shall be able to stand or retire as seems most advisable. And now to settle this important question."

For almost an hour did the tribesmen devote themselves to Tyler's proposition, and having made up their minds as to how they would act, turned to the Chinaman to interpret their meaning.

"Say that we are well satisfied with the wisdom of this journey," began their spokesman, "and are prepared to make the venture. Even to this remote part the fame of this Englishman has reached, and every report tells how he cares for our poor brothers, and slaves so that they shall lead peaceful lives. He knows that the Dyaks of the land are a contented people, and that they are willing for the most part to till the soil and live the simple life of peasants. We wish for nothing more, and as journeying to the country about Sarawak promises a change in our existence, we will take the risk and accompany the young Englishman who has become our chief."

"Then we will at once make arrangements to set out," exclaimed Tyler, rising briskly to his feet, "for I am perfectly certain that we have no time for delay. Tell them, Li Sung, that they are to collect the women and children together immediately, and pack up any valuables that they may have. Nothing beyond that which is absolutely necessary must be taken, for we shall have arms to carry with us, and, besides, a supply of food will be of the greatest importance, for then we shall have provisions for the first day's march, a time when our attentions are likely to be engaged with the enemy. And that brings me to the question of the pirates. Shall we make a stand here and endeavour to beat them back, or shall we march on at once, leaving them to follow if they care?"

"Neither the one nor the other, that's how I reckon it,"

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answered John Marshall promptly. "Yer see, sir, these here natives ain't got a single gun amongst them, and ain't a match for the Dutchman and his crew. Mind yer, I don't think much of our enemies after the blows we give them, but they've got guns in plenty, and what's more, they've already come this way and scared these poor fellows. We've a forest between us and the river, and I votes that we fill it up with our men, giving them orders to retire gradually, but not before they have picked off as many of the pirates as possible. They've plenty of sumpitans amongst them, as they call their blow-pipes, and for silent forest work no weapon could be better. If the Dutchman pushes on, our men will retire and finally disappear altogether."

"An excellent plan," exclaimed Tyler, who had listened attentively all the while, "for while a few of our men engage the enemy in the forest, the women and children with the bulk of the tribe can be pushing on towards Sarawak. Every half-hour gained in such a way will be of the utmost importance, while the process of checking the pirates can be repeated on a second occasion. Now let us learn the strength of our forces. Tell me," he went on, addressing the Chinaman, "how many men are there in this tribe, and what is the number of women and children to whose safety we shall have to look."

"Three hundred allee told," replied Li Sung, elevating three fingers the better to show his meaning, "and half can helpee you wid deir weapons, while de others am too old or too young to joinee in de fighting."

"Then we will keep fifty in reserve, while you, John, will at once push on with the greater force. Send a few men in advance, and throw out a rear-guard, with whom we will endeavour to keep in touch. I shall command the party in the forest, and shall join you when all danger of pursuit has ended. And now let us see to preparations, for we have already delayed too long."

Springing to their feet, they hurriedly gave their orders to Li Sung, who interpreted them to the Dyaks. Then, leaving

the boatswain to marshal the larger proportion of the tribe and hurry them on their way, Tyler shouldered his rifle, and, waving an adieu to his companion, went off into the forest accompanied by Li Sung and fifty of the Dyaks.

"We will call a halt here and listen to what our scouts have to tell us," he said when they had penetrated some little distance. "Then if Hanns Schlott and his men have not yet put in an appearance we will march on and lie in wait beside the river. That will give us a good five miles of jungle through which to retire and harass the foe. Send two of the men forward, Li Sung, so that they may recall a couple of the scouts and take their places while the latter return to give us their tidings."

Seating himself upon the root of a tree, for the day had been a fatiguing one and he felt in need of rest, Tyler chatted in low tones with the Chinaman while he waited with what patience he could command for the coming of the men who had been sent forward to spy upon the pirates. Nor was he put severely to the test, for the men whom Li Sung had despatched to recall them had taken to their heels at once, and had gone running through the jungle at a pace which would have taxed the powers of anyone less agile. Trained to the forest and to woodcraft from their very earliest days, they seemed to find their way through the thickest undergrowth as if they had been there hundreds of times before. Indeed, nothing seemed to stop them, for if a dense bush or the root of a tree were too low to be easily passed under they leapt the obstacle without a moment's hesitation, and went on their way without faltering and without a halt. Half an hour later two figures came bounding from amongst the trees and drew up at Tyler's feet.

"The news?" he demanded eagerly. "Where is this Dutchman and his crew of desperadoes?"

"De men say dat de pirates allee lightee so far," said Li Sung, rapidly gathering their information and interpreting it to his young leader. "Dey say dat dey have watched beside

de river, where, too, they came across de spot where you and de other massa dropped from de tree. De Dutchman am troubled. Him not knowee where him turn, but as he not findee you on de other shore him now sail de prahu dis way. When de man leave de swamp de pirates just get into de boat and row dis way."

"Then they will soon hit upon our trail," exclaimed Tyler, "and we must be there in readiness to meet them. Let the men spread out till a few yards separate each one. We will advance upon the river in that order, and you may tell them that they will keep the same positions when returning. For the last movement they will take their orders direct from me, and as soon as a word is passed down the line each will turn about and will run back fifty yards, but no more. Later on we will repeat the same movements, and gradually will retire through the forest. Let the Dyaks know that I and my friend fought this Dutchman and his full crew, and made good our escape, and inform them also that upon their bravery will depend the safety of their wives and children. And now, forward is the word."

Springing to his feet, Tyler followed the Chinaman through the jungle, noting with pleasure as he did so that the Dyaks under his command had instantly obeyed his orders, and, seeming to grasp his meaning at once, had separated. Then, too, he could not fail to see that they were in better spirits than formerly, and that his presence amongst them, and the example of coolness which he set them, had already roused their courage.

"Anoder time and dey would have run for deir lives," explained Li Sung, twisting his pigtail into a knot upon the back of his head, so as to keep it clear of the thorns and brambles which abounded on every hand. "Now dey tink dat dey safe from de Dutchman, and dey smile and feel allee merry. Dey will stand by massa velly well, for dey have seen him fight de mias."

An hour's rapid walk through the forest at length brought

Tyler and his men to the belt of swamp which fringed the river, and here they joined hands with the scouts who had already been sent to the spot, to learn at once that the prahu had dropped her anchor off the shore and had sent some fifty men into a couple of boats. The latter had been rowed towards the forest, and a few moments before Tyler's arrival had disappeared within the trees.

"Then we can expect them at any time," said Tyler when the report was brought to him, "but for the present we will retire fifty yards from the swamp, and will take up a position between our friends and the point where I and my companion landed. When they come to that the pirates will turn inland, and we shall be able to give them a lesson. Repeat to the Dyaks that they are on no account to show themselves. The presence of an enemy must be followed by the discharge of an arrow through their blow-pipes and by withdrawal into another position close at hand. They are not to retire more than a few feet until they get the word from me, or unless some special circumstance makes it necessary. Now come with me and help to place our men."

Followed by Li Sung he went off through the jungle, and ere long had the satisfaction of feeling that all his preparations were completed. Then he lay down under a dense mass of bramble and creeper, and waited for the enemy to appear.

"Hush, massa! de Dutchman him coming dis way," suddenly whispered Li Sung, pointing to the right, "and him velly much troubled. Him hunt and hunt and not find de Englishman, and him velly angry."

"But he and his men will not be long now in picking up our tracks," answered Tyler beneath his breath. "Look! there are the Malays following, and very soon they will have some news to give their leader. That will be the moment for us to surprise them."

Peering from beneath the leaves which screened him, Tyler saw the burly Hanns Schlott trudging along upon the higher land which lay beside the swamp. His eyes wandered rest-

lessly in every direction, whilst his face looked drawn and haggard, as though fear of the punishment in store for him for his crime were weighing upon his mind. Eagerly did he turn aside to inspect each broken twig which caught his eye, lest at last this should be a sign of the fugitives; and when at length one of the Malay crew who walked beside him called his attention to some footprints in the ground, the Dutchman gave vent to a shout of triumph which startled the forest and at once called all his men about him. Then, placing two possessed of the keenest sight a few paces in advance, he plunged into the jungle, determined to follow wherever the footmarks led.

CHAPTER IX

On Foot through the Jungle

WELL was it for Tyler and the Dyaks, whose chief he had so suddenly become, that he had made arrangements for meeting the enemy with such thoroughness; for otherwise Hanns Schlott and the fifty men or more who accompanied him would have pushed on through the forest at a pace which would rapidly have eclipsed that of the retreating tribe and would have speedily overwhelmed them. But there were those lurking in the jungle prepared to arrest the progress of the pirates, and thanks to the resolute air which Tyler had displayed, and to the knowledge which the Dyaks now possessed, that he, with John Marshall alone to help him, had faced the crew of the prahu and safely escaped, they were full of confidence in their young chief's powers to lead them and bring them safely out of the engagement. Crouching there amongst the dense undergrowth, each man lifted the long wooden blowpipe which these Dyak tribes use, and having already placed within it a sharp-pointed arrow, at the base of which was a pith-bulb to hold the air, they pointed them at the Malays and waited for the word to fire.

Hish! One of the pirates who had been sent in advance to follow the tracks of the fugitives gave a gasping cry, and fell upon his face, his hands convulsively grasping one of the tiny arrows.

"What has happened?" demanded Hans Schlott, giving a start of surprise. "Get up at once, and do not alarm us by your antics. Come, drag the fellow to his feet," he went on, seeing that the Malay lay still with his head buried in the

undergrowth. "He imagines himself hurt, and will lie there till we force him to rise."

"He is dead!" exclaimed one of his comrades, rushing to his side and turning him upon his back. "See here, someone has fired at him with a blow-pipe. It must be the Dyaks who have been watching."

"Then they shall suffer!" burst in the Dutchman with an oath. "Once before we raided them, and a fine fat sum we gained by our slaves, I recollect. They shall be punished again, and in the meanwhile the death of one of our number shall not deter us. Push on, and keep your eyes open wide for these snakes of natives. A shot into the jungle will soon scare them. Ho there! Level your weapons, all of you, and direct them so as to sweep close to the ground. Then pull the triggers as I give the word."

Waiting till all his men had run to him, and had become ready to carry out his orders, Hanns Schlott shouted "Fire!" a volley of musketry being at once poured into the bushes. Then with an answering shout his men sprang forward upon the trail. As for Tyler and his little force, for the moment the Dyaks were dismayed at the swishing bullets and at the patter of twigs and leaves which resulted. But they had suffered no harm, and that thanks to the fact that each one had kept his eyes fixed upon the enemy, and at the first sign of the movement had lain flat upon the ground. But in spite of their lucky escape they would have given back at once, and have plunged in mad flight into the forest, had it not been for Tyler. With a shout to encourage them, he fired at the nearest Malay and brought him staggering upon the ground. Then Li Sung's voice joined in and helped to maintain the courage of the Dyaks.

"Fear them not!" he cried in the Dyak language. "We are as yet unseen, and can punish them. Think of the women and children taken into captivity by these men! Keep your places and shoot straight!"

"I heard the voice of that Englishman," shouted Hanns

Schlott. "Then he has picked up some of the Dyaks and hopes to beat us back with their aid. But he will soon learn that they are poor fighters, and will desert him. Forward, and do not let these men keep you!"

Striding to the front of his men, he led the way into the jungle, feeling confident that, at the most, the white men for whom he searched could not have obtained the help of more than a few of the natives. But he quickly changed his mind, for ere he had traversed a dozen paces one of the silent missiles again swished with its low peculiar note through the air, and, striking the Dutchman in the shoulder, brought him to a sudden halt.

"A second arrow, but not poisoned!" he cried, giving vent to an exclamation of annoyance and pain. "Not poisoned, as I said, my men, for that I happen to know. It is nothing—a mere pin-prick—and shall not stop us. On! shoot them down, and capture this runaway!"

Plucking the arrow from his clothing and from the flesh beneath, Hans Schlott sprang boldly into the underwood, a drawn revolver in each hand. But his men held back doubtfully, their fears aroused by the sound of Tyler's voice.

"They have guns! The white men will turn them upon us as they did on the schooner, and we shall be killed!" called out one of their number, retreating towards the swamp. "See! a comrade has already paid with his life, and others of us will fall. They are unseen also, while we are an open target."

"You at least are in sight," was the Dutchman's answer, as he swung round upon his cowardly follower. "Move another step backwards and I will fire! Come, do not be frightened by his tale," he went on as the man came to a sudden halt and stood trembling before the weapon which his leader held levelled at his breast. "You are not all so chicken-hearted as this girl! Will you be driven back, and for the third time at least, by a couple of boys without hair on their white faces, and by a few half-starved natives whose knees knock at the

mention of your names? Forward! Charge through the forest and hunt these rats out!"

Emboldened by his words, the pirates quickly recovered their spirit, and, seeing that Hanns Schlott was prepared to lead them in person, at once fell in behind him, and, rifle in hand, plunged into the jungle. Separating, so that a considerable interval lay between each man, they threw themselves down upon their knees so as to render themselves less visible, and in this manner began to stalk their enemies.

"We will retire at once," said Tyler, perceiving their action, and realizing that, now that they were fully alarmed and had knowledge of the presence of enemies, the pirates would creep to close quarters and ruin his plans. "By remaining here we run the chance of having the Malays upon us and of engaging in a hand-to-hand struggle. That is just what I do not want, for then the Dyaks will be beaten, and at the sight of their old enemies will turn and fly. We will retire some two hundred yards, and perhaps when Hanns Schlott and his men see that the forest directly in front of them is clear they will imagine that we have gone altogether. In that case we shall be able to surprise them again. Give the word, Li Sung."

"I will give de signal which all know," was the answer. "Li Sung him make de sound of de parrot. Plenty same bird in de forest, and men of Dyak tribe know at once that dey are to creep back. Dere!"

Rising swiftly to his feet the Chinaman sounded the note of a parrot, and again falling upon his knees began to crawl off through the undergrowth. Tyler also turned about, and went off swiftly in the wake of Li Sung, taking good care to keep his head low. When he had traversed some two hundred yards, and all sounds of the pirates had ceased for some little time, he called gently to his guide and motioned to him to come to a halt.

"We are far enough now, I think," he said calmly. "Give the signal again, and then lead me round to inspect the posi-

tions taken up by the natives. Give each one directions also to be ready to retire again at any moment, only they are not to forget that on the next occasion they are to crawl only some fifty yards, unless, as has happened this time, they see me retire still farther. Now hurry, and, above all, keep silence."

Having brought the Dyaks to a halt by the signal, Li Sung went off on all-fours at a rapid rate, taxing Tyler's strength to the full to keep up with him. A gentle call as they went soon brought them to the lurking-place which each individual had selected, and at once the orders were handed to him, the Chinaman acting as interpreter.

"Now back," said Tyler, when all was to his satisfaction. "Let me know the instant that the pirates come near us."

"No need to tellee dat," said Li Sung. "Massa him keepee little ear widee open and him hear. De Malay man come swift velly soon. Him tink no little man wait for de pirates, but allee gone. 'Velly fine,' him say to himself, but wait. Li Sung know muchee better dan dat. S-s-s-s-h! I tink I hear dem."

The gentle rustle of leaves brushed aside, and the snap of breaking twigs under foot, broke upon the ear and brought Tyler full length to the earth once more, where, burying his head in the centre of a dense bush, he peered amongst the trees.

"Hish! S-s-s-sh!" came again from the pigtailed Chinaman. "Li Sung him can hear men over dere, and dey not creeping. Dey walking wid head velly high, and dem say dat de white man whom dey hate havee gone away. Wait a little bitee. De Dyaks and deir friend soon tellee anoder story. Hish!"

Lying beside Tyler, he whispered the words into his ear, and then pulled him by the sleeve as louder sounds than usual issued from the jungle. Then as both peered from their leafy screen, first one, and then some thirty of the Malays came into view, while behind them their comrades could be heard calling. As for the Dutchman, he was not long in putting in an appearance, for, as the last of the pirates hurried up, he

too walked forward, all unconscious of the fact that fifty pair of watching eyes were fixed upon him.

"A wild-goose chase!" he was saying to his men, while a sneer wreathed his features. "The white hero has at last given way, and has fled with these savages. But we will soon catch them up, for they are but poorly fed, and will be hampered with their women and children. Keep together, and let one only take the lead, so that the tracks shall not be smothered. Now."

In a bunch all came forward at his bidding, while one of their number whom Hanns Schlott called by name sprang to their front and began to lead the way. Now was the time for Tyler and his men, and waiting only till the enemy were within easy shot of the blow-pipes, the former shouted so that all could hear, and at the same time fired his rifle into the middle of the Malays. A second discharge followed, and ere Hanns Schlott and his men could recover from their astonishment, or could realize the fact that six of their number had fallen, the silent watchers had stolen off on hands and knees and had taken up another position some fifty yards in rear.

Twice again did the Dyaks under Tyler's lead cause loss to the enemy, for though the latter now came through the jungle feeling their way by inches, and probing every bush with their bullets, the watchers constantly moved their position, and always directed their arrows from a different quarter. At length Hanns Schlott realized that to go farther would be to risk being surrounded and cut off, and with an oath at once ordered a retreat.

"Walk back to the swamp slowly, and keep in hiding all the time," he said as he turned about. "Then they will not be able to rush us, and we shall reach our boats in safety. I will keep in your centre, so that all may know that I am with you. As for you, Tyler Richardson," he shouted over his shoulder, "you have beaten me this time, and have won handsomely; but you shall know what it is to be hunted. I tell you that I will sail at once to my friends, and when I

return it will be with hundreds. Yes, hundreds shall come who will be willing and eager to do my bidding. Then I will follow across the land, even as far as Sarawak, where your countryman has set up his rule. And more than that, I will cut off your journey on the way, for there are rivers to be crossed, my friend, and you shall find that some of the sea Dyaks are there to stop you and to fall upon their brothers of the land, whom they hate and whose heads they long for. Adieu for the present! Soon, very soon, I shall have your head, and then I tell you that I will place it in a basket and hang it at the foretop of the prahu so that all who care can see what is the fate of a beggarly Englishman."

"I will not deign to answer," said Tyler in Li Sung's ear. "He is full of threats and nothing more. I do not fear him, and as for this tale of more men, I do not believe that he has them. It is more than likely that he is merely trying to frighten me, and that until I search for him myself and come upon him I shall not see him again. He has been badly beaten, and he will do all that he can after this to keep out of the way. But he shall not escape, for he is a murderer, and I owe it to my dead friend to follow till he is taken."

"Den it must be later on," answered Li Sung, elevating his eyebrows and looking at his young leader with wrinkled brow. "Listen, massa, and Li Sung him tellee you little ting about de Dutchman. He say he comee after you wid plenty much men. Him speakee de truth."

"How do you know?" demanded Tyler, turning upon him in surprise.

"Li Sung him know because him once pirate too," was the simple reply. "Him sail from Singapore for Borneo with plenty dollar in him pocket, and get captured by de pirates. Dis Dutchman deir leader, wid anoder of de same country."

"Christian van Sonerell!" exclaimed Tyler, listening eagerly to the news which the Chinaman was giving him. "He is dead, for he fell when my friend and I captured the schooner."

"Den he one velly bad man out of de way, massa. Him cruel man and beat and kick poor Li Sung till him shout for mercy. But me tellee you all. Dis pirate makee me slave, and set me to pull de oar of one of de prahus. Dere Li sit for many days, and wid de prahu him go to de Sarebus tribes."

"The Sarebus tribe! Why, they are notorious pirates," said Tyler. "My friend who owned the schooner which the pirates captured, and which we stole from them again, told me that the Malays and Dyaks of the Sarebus were bloodthirsty in the extreme, and were for ever raiding the coast. And you went there?"

"Many times, massa. Li Sung him chained to de oar wid many anoder slave, and him pull and pull until de hands blister and get sore, while de lash of de pirates cutee him shoulders. But massa not knowee allee about dese Sarebus men. Dey havee plenty fine prahus, and often dey put to sea wid fifty or more ships and many hundred men. Den dey cruise along about Borneo, sometimes going as far even as de China Sea, and ebery day dey pounce upon de merchant-ships. Sometimes him a native filled with birds'-nests or gum. And den it am a ship wid white-faces on board. Dey all suffer de same. De crew am killed wid the kriss, and de ship am sunk after all her cargo am taken. Dey fear no man, dese pirates, and de Dutchman am now deir leader. Him follow for sure, massa, and him send news to de Sarebus tribe to lie in de way."

The Chinaman became suddenly silent, as if the prospect which he had so suddenly opened out were too much for him. As for Tyler, the news amazed him, and filled his mind with anxious forebodings. He, too, had heard of the pirates about Borneo, and had had many a chat on the subject with Mr. Beverley, from whom he had learned their history. The Archipelago was, in fact, overrun with these sea-robbers and murderers, and it had been at first somewhat difficult to realize who were the peaceful natives and who the piratical ones

But at length Tyler had come to know that Borneo was peopled with many races, and that the Malays inhabited many of the coast towns. For years they had beaten down their Dyak neighbours, and though as a general rule the latter would have preferred to live quiet lives and till the soil, they had been compelled to join the Malays simply because of the fact that existence was impossible in any other way. Still, numbers who lived farther inland would have nothing to do with the pirates, and had they had the opportunities would have become contented tribes. But here again the baneful influence of the new-comers was evidenced, for the Malays ground down these poor people and fleeced them shamefully. And so, finding that in spite of diligence and hard work they could not better their condition, the inland tribes took to making war upon one another.

Head-hunting, which had always been the vogue, became a mania with many of the tribes, and bloodshed was of daily occurrence. To marry or to make any change in his existence a man had to obtain a head or heads, and it mattered little how he came by the trophies. Often he waylaid his enemy in the forest and slew him without a word of warning, returning in triumph as though he had done the bravest deed. The death of a king or chief, a birth, in fact any unusual occasion, had to be celebrated by the taking of heads, and often, too, by the slaying of slaves.

Again, slavery was common, and the Malays were for ever raiding these inland tribes by means of the rivers, for the purpose of making captives, whom they sold. And thus when Tyler landed on the coast of Borneo it was to find the country in a state of chaos and misery, except perhaps in the neighbourhood of Sarawak, where James Brooke had settled. Elsewhere all was given over to violence and piracy, the Dyaks of the land fighting one another and taking heads, while the Malays and the Dyaks of the coast, known as the sea Dyaks, ravaged the river towns and cruised in the open sea. Within a hundred miles of Sarawak there were many of their strong-

holds, and perhaps the most important of all was that at Sarebus, where dwelt the ruffians under Hanns Schlott's command.

For long did Tyler lie there thinking the matter out, until the Chinaman touched him upon the arm and urged him to retire.

"De pirates gone, but velly soon dey come again in plenty big numbers," he said, with a doleful shake of his head. "Better put as much of de land between us as we can, den de Dutchman have furder to walk, and perhaps we havee time to comee to Sarawak."

"Then we will retire at once and catch the tribe up, Li Sung. Call the men together, and send four of the best scouts after the pirates to see that they really embark. Once they have watched them depart they can rejoin us, and I have no doubt that they will have little difficulty in doing so, for they are used to the forest."

"And can run for many hours, massa. Leavee it to dem, and Li Sung him tellee you dat dey reach de tribe before we are dere."

Once again the shriek of a parrot awoke the forest, bringing all the men together at once. Then, having taken the precaution to send some of their number back to the river, there to watch the pirates till they had gone, and to throw out a few scouts in advance and on either hand, the main body pushed on at a rapid pace in the wake of their friends. And now, as they trudged through the jungle, Tyler had ample opportunity of observing his strange companions. He saw that they were fine, athletic-looking men, with muscular figures and powerful limbs. All were almost naked, and the only clothing of which they boasted was a loin-cloth and a handkerchief of gaudy colouring which encircled the head. At the waist was slung a pouch containing betel-nut, which all delighted to chew, while in addition a bundle of arrows was carried. A short sword, with a handle of carved wood, completed the weapons of offence, while a big shield of bark,

which was slung over the shoulders, afforded some protection in hand-to-hand contests.

That evening, as the sun was about to set, Tyler and his men came up with the main portion of the tribe, and found them encamped on the edge of a small stream which provided abundant water.

"And now to discuss the situation and prepare for to-morrow," said Tyler, when he had taken something to eat and had thrown himself down beside John Marshall. "We have a big journey before us, and many dangers to face. Already I have told you of Hanns Schlott's threat, and of the Sarebus pirates who will waylay us. What course shall we take? Tell me what you think, for you have had little else to do for the last few hours."

"And I can't say that I've been able to fix the matter," was the sailor's candid answer. "Yer see, sir, I wasn't aware of these here Sarebus fellers. They jest makes all the difference, and when you tell me that they're goin' to waylay us, why, it makes me think that we'll have to retire on the river. We ain't fit to fight a tribe of them Malays, and if we go on we'll get chopped to pieces. Now there's the schooner. She'd float with a little help."

"And we should sail away, leaving these unfortunate Dyaks to meet Hanns Schlott alone," said Tyler quietly. "You did not think of that, did you, John?"

"You're right there, sir, I didn't, or I'd never have proposed the move. But I don't see no other way out of the trouble."

"Then we will push on and trust to good fortune and to careful leading. I have watched the men I had with me in the forest, and I could see that they were full of excitement at first, and that the very sound of an approaching pirate made them tremble and think of flight. After the first brush, however, they began to have confidence in themselves, and now they are bursting with their own importance. Their spirit will extend to the others, and if we only foster it, and let

them see that they are as good as the Malays, they will fight hard for their lives, and for the sake of their women and children.

"But they are useless as they are, for they rush about in a mob, and there is no commanding them. For that reason we will divide them up into three companies of fifty, one of which I will look after, while you and Li Sung lead the others. The remainder will guard the women and children. We will march in that order, and when we get in the neighbourhood of the Sarebus river we will send scouts ahead. What do you think of that plan?"

"It's a good 'un, and of that there ain't a doubt," was John's emphatic answer; "and next to the idea of a boat I think it's the best. Yer see, if it had been possible to pack the whole lot on to the schooner we could have sailed right into Sarawak, and could have easily beaten off a prahu or two. But it's no use bothering when we all know that the schooner isn't big enough for half the number."

"While Hanns Schlott may very well have thought of the same thing," burst in Tyler, "and for fear that we should refloat her and sail away, may blow her to pieces, or take her himself. No, a journey by land is the only thing for us, though should the opportunity arrive of seizing boats belonging to the pirates I should not hesitate. But now to see to the camp and to the guards. To-morrow we will arrange the companies and instruct the men."

Rising to their feet Tyler and his companion went the round of the camp, taking Li Sung with them to interpret. Then, having seen that guards were thrown out in the forest, and all precautions taken against surprise, they wrapped themselves in some rough cloth which the natives had provided and fell into a deep sleep. Early on the following morning they were afoot, and calling all the men of the tribe together at once informed them of their intention to divide them into companies.

"It is the way in which the white men of our race fight," said Tyler, addressing himself to Li Sung, who obediently

interpreted to the Dyaks. "By splitting our numbers in the way I propose, we provide three companies capable of acting independently of one another, or together, while we set them free of the care of the women and children. Of course if we were hard pressed we should place the latter in the centre, so as to give them more safety, but we shall hope that it will never come to that. Again, on the march one company can go in advance, and to it will be given the task of seeing that the jungle is clear of the enemy. The second will march in rear and guard that portion, while the third can roam at will and can replenish our stock of food. I understand that all of the tribe are trained hunters, and that being the case there should be no need for us to starve."

"The words of our leader are full of wisdom," replied the young chief who had formerly addressed Tyler, "and we are willing to do his bidding. More than that, we are pleased at the manner in which he led the men who held the pirates back, and we say that while he is with us we are ready to fight, whatever the numbers opposed to us and whatever the dangers. He has proved himself a great and wise commander, and we know also that he is brave. Can we ask for a better leader, and can we refuse what his experience dictates?"

A guttural exclamation of approval burst from his fellows as Li Sung turned to interpret the words, while a few who had formed part of the rear-guard on the previous day sprang to their feet and waved their weapons above their heads in their excitement.

"Say that we will even fight all these Sarebus pirates," called out one of them, a fine stalwart man of light complexion. "They will be thinking of pursuit only, and will never dream, my friends, that we should be bold enough to throw ourselves upon them. Why, then, should we not take them by surprise, and ere they could turn upon us in their full numbers, having recovered from their astonishment, disappear like ghosts, just as we did but yesterday when in the forest?"

Again a shout of approval burst from the assembled warriors, while the young chief rose to his feet and, mastering his excitement with an effort, addressed Tyler for the second time.

"We are even ready to do that," he said slowly. "As our comrade says, let us change for once from being those who fly. For years it has been our fate to be hunted. We have toiled and striven for comfort and peace, and all that we have asked is to be allowed to remain in our homes, there to live quietly. But time and again have these pirates come upon us and rooted us out. They have taken wives and children from the tribe, and they have sent us homeless and scattered into the jungle. Brothers, the time has come to change all this. But yesterday I should have been afraid to mention such a thing; indeed, the thought would never have crossed my brain. But the fighting in the forest, the ease with which we drove this hated Dutchman and his men back, and the fact that we have as a leader a man who is brave, who faced the mias without fear, and who has even escaped from the pirates, having beaten them with the help of one companion alone, induces me to urge you to think of punishment, of retaliation. Let us fall upon these pirates swiftly, and when least expected, and then, as our brother says, and as our leader suggested yesterday, let us do all that is possible to them and retire into the depths of the forest ere they can attack us in force. Surely that is a brighter prospect than to be ever flying? Surely if we are men this is a plan which should meet with our approval!"

Drawing himself to his full height, the young Dyak looked round at the tribesmen, searching each face closely. Had he had any doubt of their wishes in the matter, or of their determination to turn the tables on their enemies, it was at once dispelled, for with the usual impulsiveness of these savage people they all with one accord leapt to their feet, and, brandishing their shields and weapons in the air, set up a shout of defiance.

"There," said the chief, turning with a grave smile to Tyler,

"you see what can be expected. Two days ago these warriors were only warriors in name, for all were dispirited. No one has ever led them, and when we have met the pirates it has always been in scattered groups. Now you have shown us that by keeping together, by coming upon the enemy unawares, and by retiring before they can assemble to harm us, we can meet them with success. We will follow you blindly, and since it is clear that this Dutchman will do all that he can to take us, and that death will stare us all in the face, while our women and children will be captured and made slaves, why, we will fight hard and do all that men can to defeat our opponents."

"Then we will set about the division of the tribe, and will draw up rules for the guidance of each company," said Tyler, as soon as the words had been conveyed to him by the Chinaman. "You can tell them, Li Sung, that absolute obedience must be given, and that the arrangement must be carried out at once."

At his orders all sat down again, and then the young chief rapidly called the men apart, telling each individual off to one of the three companies. All who were left were sent to take charge of the women and children, while the others listened while Li Sung interpreted their white leader's directions.

"Tell them that those who march in advance will send back news and orders immediately they come upon the enemy," he said. "They are then to close in to the women and children, while those who are abroad hunting will at once return so as to be at hand in case they are required. On no account is a warrior to betray his presence to an enemy. He is to send back a comrade to the main body and to me, so that others may be sent to the scene. See that they understand thoroughly, for it would never do to have confusion."

An hour later the tribe of Dyaks marched from their bivouac, Tyler, with one of the companies, leading the way. Marching through dense jungle again, it was some considerable time before more open ground was reached, for the island of

Borneo is a thickly wooded one. At length, however, they emerged upon a stony plain, and trudged on for miles over rocks and boulders till more trees came into view, and in their midst a river of great depth, which barred their onward progress.

"What shall we do to cross?" asked Tyler of Li Sung, who had accompanied him, handing over the command of his own company to the native chief. "The river is too deep for the women and children, so that it will not help us if we men swim across."

"You will see, massa," was the Chinaman's laconic reply. "De Dyaks used to de forest, and de river, and dey show you how to cross velly soon. See, dey am searching for a tree, and will cut it down."

Standing on one side, our hero watched with interest as the natives searched along the bank for a suitable tree. Soon they came upon a long, stout bamboo, at the foot of which two lusty youths commenced to hack with their swords, while others leant against the trunk so as to direct it across the stream. It was wonderful to see how quickly they cut it down, and with what dexterity they caused it to fall in the right direction. Scarcely was it fallen, and its boughs safely lodged upon the farther bank, than one of the Dyaks sprang upon the trunk, and without the help of a guide-rail or of a stick, ran across it. Others followed swiftly and commenced to hack the branches away, and when it came to Tyler's turn to essay the crossing, only a long slim trunk stretched from bank to bank. Very different was it to him with his boots on his feet to balance upon the frail bridge, but his followers were looking on, and, therefore, though the trunk bent and swayed in an alarming manner, and though the water was some twenty feet beneath, he went on without a halt and without so much as a falter.

"Massa has done velly fine," said Li Sung, following across the stream and kow-towing. "The crossing am one which asks for all de courage, and de white man was not likee dese

natives, for he has boots of leather upon his feet. But we shall be able to go on plenty quick, and de tribe will follow without a halt. If we meet another river we shall do de same, and I can tellee de massa dat de Borneans are never stopped by such a thing. Bamboos help dem everywhere, and if dey require to do anyding they turn to dat tree. Deir houses am framed with de bamboo, dey make stockades wid de trunks, and if dey wish to climb de tallest tree for fruit or for honey, de same wood comes to aid dem. But shall we go on, massa? De country am open and de day am velly fine."

Halting occasionally to rest the men and to allow those in rear to catch them up, Tyler and his company kept on a direct course towards the distant town of Sarawak. Not for one moment would their young leader allow the line to be departed from, or a detour to be made so as to avoid the river upon which was situated the stronghold of the Sarebus pirates.

"They would fall in with us just the same," he said to John, when discussing the question, "and by going farther to the left, into the heart of the island, we shall be giving ourselves a longer tramp and to no purpose. And besides, by missing the river we shall lose all chance of capturing boats and taking to the sea."

"Yer ain't thinking of taking their prahus?" exclaimed John in amazement. "It's a big job, and might cost us our lives."

"It might," had been Tyler's answer, "but I am inclined to think that it would be the best course for us to pursue, for if not, we shall have to retreat to Sarawak by land with all these pirates hanging on to our rear. In that way they would manage to kill many of our men, while we should be constantly harassed. By doing as I suggest we shall come upon these Malays and their comrades when they least expect us, and with a little fortune on our side shall defeat them. Then, if we have laid our plans well, we may be able to embark the whole tribe and set sail. I would far rather face them at sea than know that they were hanging on our heels as we trudged

through the jungle, and that at any moment, and particularly during the night, they might charge down upon us and stampede the men. A bold course will best help us to reach safety."

Day after day did the tribe push on in the direction of Sarawak. Occasionally, when there happened to be a wide break in the trees, they would catch a sight of the blue ocean, but very soon it would be hidden by the forest or by the hills. On their left, and many miles inland of them, a long blue range of hills stretched unbrokenly, cutting them off from the centre of Borneo, while here and there an isolated mountain reared its peak into the sky. Overhead a hot sun poured down upon them, blistering Tyler's face and tanning his skin; but it troubled him far less than it would have done had they been marching across plains, for the leaves above sheltered them greatly, while when passing across a clearing of wide extent a palm leaf thrust beneath his wide-brimmed hat made him secure against sunstroke. At length the retreating tribe came within some sixty miles of the winding river of Sarebus, where Hanns Schlott and his pirates might be expected, and at once Tyler set to work to prepare for the struggle.

"At present we have not instructed our men in the attack," he said, calling John Marshall and the Chinaman to him. "Coming through the forest we have kept one formation, and the Dyaks have learnt how to march in safety very well. I think that there has never been a day when an enemy could have taken us unawares, while ample watch has been kept at night. But now we ought to have some practice in working together for the attack, and I propose that we devote an hour or more each evening to the purpose. Let it be understood that at about two hours before sunset the company in advance is to turn round and act as an enemy. The remainder will march with one company in rear as before, and with half the third company between the women and children and the men who have gone in advance, and who are for the time being to take the part of pirates. To make sure that no accidents can

happen, we will let them wear a strip of cloth on their arms, or, better still, let them attack bareheaded. Then we shall know at once that they are really friends.

"As to their method of approaching us, I leave that to them, but they must do their best to surround us and cut us off, while we will place our men so as to drive them away. No harm can possibly result, while the practice cannot fail to do good, and steady the men for our approaching fight with the Sarebus pirates. Li Sung, you will call the chiefs together and tell them what I say, and also that we will commence practising to-morrow evening."

On the following day it was evident that the spirits of the warriors of the Dyak tribe of which Tyler was the leader were considerably raised at the prospect before them, while their whole demeanour was changed. Instead of being down at heart and fearful of the future, they seemed to have imbibed some of their white chief's enthusiasm, and they set about the work of making themselves efficient with a zeal which showed how eager they were. Marching quietly through the day, with an occasional rest so as not to overtire the women and children, they came to a halt some two hours before the sun would set, and went silently to the posts which had been assigned to them. Very soon scouts came running in to say that men who were bareheaded were creeping through the jungle, and ere long the two bodies were engaged, blunted arrows being used so as to make the practice more real. For three evenings in succession was the same movement carried out, and when at length the scouts who had been sent far in advance returned with the news that the Sarebus river was in sight, and that they had seen one of the many piratical strongholds, Tyler had his men well in hand. Thanks to his forethought the natives now kept together, and instead of making frantic and useless rushes, waited for the signal from their captain. A shrill call, too, would bring all the companies together to one spot, while those who had the important post of guarding the women

and children thoroughly understood how to protect them against the enemy, and how, when the day seemed to be going against their comrades, to steal away with their charges into the jungle and there seek safety in flight.

And so it turned out that when the news arrived that the foe was at hand, the Dyaks heard it with cries of pleasure instead of with those of fear and dismay, for they were more than anxious to try conclusions with an enemy from whom they had suffered heavily.

CHAPTER X

The Pirate Stronghold

"AT last we are close to these Malays and the sea Dyaks," said Tyler with a sigh of relief, when the news of the proximity of the Sarebus river was brought to him, "and as it is very necessary that the leader of our party should be fully acquainted with their haunts, I shall leave the tribe at once and push on with a few followers. To you, John, I leave the post of commander during my absence, with instructions to remain here in hiding till I return or send for you. You will place scouts all round, and keep a most careful watch, for were you to be seen by any stray native the news would buzz to the ears of Hanns Schlott and his men, and we should have to turn tail and run for our lives. Remember that sudden attack, and still more rapid disappear ance, are the only movements for us, and that to stand up to all the pirates would be fatal, for they have firearms in plenty, while we have none."

"Then the orders are to remain here for the present," replied the young boatswain, touching his cap. "Right, sir! and I'll obey so long as all goes well. But supposing you fall into this Dutchman's clutches? What'll I do then?"

"Whatever seems most sensible, but rescue will be out of the question. Don't imagine that Hanns Schlott would keep me a prisoner for long. He would have me killed at once, and it is that fact which will make me fight all the harder in case I am attacked. But it will not come to that, I hope, for I and the men who are to accompany me will steal upon them like ghosts."

"But massa may happen to be seen," interrupted Li Sung, who had listened intently. "Supposing Malay or sea Dyak come suddenly up while huntin' in de forest, and see de white man? Den him runee for him life, and shout dat de enemy am near. And velly soon de white man havee him head right off—a-a-ah!"

Li Sung grasped at his pigtail, and, lifting it well above his head, made as if to sever his neck with the long blade which dangled from his belt.

"Not nicee, dat," he went on with a grimace. "Dis Dutchman wantee de head of massa, and massa him likee to choppee de head of de pirate leader. Velly fine, but massa must havee plenty care. Suppose you go like de Dyak? Den if de pirates see you dey tink you one of demselves and not shout and try to takee de head."

Li Sung cocked his head knowingly on one side and looked at Tyler anxiously, for he thought much of the young Englishman who had so suddenly come into his life, and was fearful for his safety.

"Den p'r'aps you be able to takee plenty fine sight of de stockade," he added eagerly. "Besides, Li Sung him knowee de river, and draw him for you so."

Reminding Tyler that he had once been one of the pirates, though much against his will, and had been with them into the Sarebus river, the Chinaman again dragged his sword from his belt, and, clearing a wide patch of sandy ground from fallen leaves, began to roughly outline the course of the river and the position of the Malay towns and stockades.

As for our hero, the suggestion which Li Sung had just made occupied his thoughts almost to the exclusion of all others, though when the sketch was completed he followed each line with the utmost attention, and, not satisfied with that, transferred the drawing to a scrap of crinkled and dirty paper which he happened by good chance to have with him. But he did not allow the question of disguise to escape him, and at once returned to it.

"There is no doubt that the sight of a white man other than the Dutchman or a European who is in league with him would at once raise the neighbourhood. Hanns Schlott and his men would immediately guess that I was near at hand, and that would put them on their guard and ruin our plans. Besides, there is no doubt that it would mean the destruction of the tribe who have selected me as leader, for our numbers are ridiculously small when compared with the pirates, while we are practically unarmed. We should be cut to pieces in the jungle, and that would be the end of our journey. No, I must go as a Dyak or as a Malay, and in that way escape observation."

"And I reckon as it wouldn't be a bad thing for me to do the same, sir," broke in John Marshall. "Yer see, there ain't any knowing when we may drop on some of these covies, and the sight of me would send 'em howling, jest the same as it would if they dropped their eyes on you. Let's both get made into darkies, and then we'll be ready for anything."

"And Li Sung him see dat allee managed for you," said the Chinaman with a smile. "Him velly fine man, de China boy, and him done same ting often and often. Plenty dye wid de Dyaks, and if massa and his friend havee little patience Li Sung bring de stuff. De dress am noding. Ebery man here help wid dat."

And what about our feet?" demanded Tyler suddenly, realizing that it would be impossible to trudge through the forest without becoming rapidly lame. Indeed, he knew that it would require more than a week of careful walking to harden the skin sufficiently to allow them to cross smooth ground, but when there were stones and thorns progress would be impossible, or, at any rate, exceedingly painful.

"You see," he went on, "we have worn boots up to this, and I am sure that it would never do for us to go barefooted. We should be laid up after the very first day's tramp."

"Then why not get these darkies to make sandals or some such foot-covering for us, sir?" asked the boatswain. "They're

clever enough at that sort of thing, and I ain't a doubt but what they'll be able to turn out something suitable from bamboo or some of the leaves in the forest. What do yer say, Johnnie?"

"Dat you am velly right. De Dyaks makee plenty fine sandal velly soon. Leave it to Li Sung, and him comee back wid de tings."

"Then be as quick as you can," said Tyler, "for I wish to push on at once. We have made a fairly rapid march up to this, and it is probable that the pirates are not expecting us as yet. Indeed I hope that they will have taken it for granted that we have made a wide detour, in which case they will have sent men towards the mountains, the line which we should have taken had it been our object and intention to avoid this river on which they have their stronghold. In any case, as I have said, they would hardly expect us here at present, if at all, and by seeing that we do not delay, we shall have all the more opportunity of effecting a surprise. How long will you be, Li Sung?"

"One, p'r'aps two little hour, massa. But Li go see at once, and come back velly soon."

With this reply the Chinaman went away towards the encamped tribe of Dyaks, with his pigtail dangling over his arm. Evidently the cunning fellow was busily thinking over his master's wants, for his chin was on his breast and his face lined with wrinkles. But, like all of his country, his wits were sharp, and as he went he had already made up his mind how to carry out Tyler's wishes. In fact, only half the time mentioned by him had elapsed when he was seen to be returning, carrying a bundle.

"If de massa and him friend will stripee off de clothes Li will stain de bodies of both wid dis stuff," he said, producing a gourd filled with an oily liquid of reddish-brown colour. "Dey need not fear dat dis am poison, for me tellee dem dat it only de juice of de betel-nut. When deir bodies seen to, Li havee someting else for dem."

With a grin of pleasure at the thought of his success, and at the rapidity with which he had carried out the matter, Li Sung accompanied Tyler and John Marshall to their bivouac, where the latter quickly removed their clothing. Then, with a splintered end of bamboo which he had pounded between a couple of smooth boulders till it was as pliable and soft as any brush, the Chinaman set about the work of transforming them from clear-complexioned Englishmen to the colour of Dyaks. Twice did he go over the surface of their bodies, and then, standing some paces away, he inspected them critically, his head on one side and a comical air of severity and anxiety upon his features. As for the two young fellows, they stood before him with grave faces, which bore only the smallest traces of trouble, for they were confident of the ability of Li Sung to convert them to the appearance of Dyaks.

"After all," said Tyler, with a little laugh which he attempted to make careless in tone, "we need only be disguised sufficiently to escape detection at some distance, for if the enemy actually come within a few paces of either of us it will be a case of fighting, for they are bound to discover that we are not what we seem to be. You must recollect that we do not speak more than a few words of the language."

"But de massa may pass with oders who am plenty able to talkee Dyak," cried Li Sung. "S'pose him go soon to de strong place of de pirates and wish to enter. Den if he stay behind de oders, and not seem to have de lead, one of de warriors speakee to de enemy. But me not satisfied. One little moment and me see how you lookee. Massa and him friend must put on de Dyak cloths."

Unfastening the bundle which he had brought under his arm, and which was enclosed in a couple of enormous leaves, he produced a couple of the loin-cloths worn by the natives, and also two gaudy handkerchiefs to bind about their heads. Within them were wrapped two pairs of neat sandals manufactured by the Dyaks, and composed of thin slips of flexible bamboo thickly padded with strips of skin.

"De hide make him soft to de feet," explained Li Sung, nolding them up for inspection with great pride. "Den dey velly silent, so dat massa and him friend can comee plenty near to de pirate without making noise. Now for de betel-nut and de stain again. Please to open de mouth of you both, and Li him paint de teeth."

Baring their teeth in obedience to his wish, both Tyler and John Marshall submitted to the operation of having them coloured reddish-brown with the stain, and then chewed at the nut which their Chinese helper had thrust between their lips.

"I suppose that it is a custom which one has to acquire," remarked Tyler with a grimace. "I must say that if I had any choice in the matter I would rather not chew anything, and least of all the betel-nut. Still, all the natives have the habit, and it will be as well for us to develop it also."

"I'd rather a plug of twist any day," grunted John in disgust. "Sour! Why, this here betel's worse than anythin'. But as yer say, it's for the best, and as I reckon our safety'll depend upon sich little things, why—"

The boatswain turned the nut into his other cheek with another exclamation of disgust, and set to work to chew it with an air of resignation which called a smile to Tyler's features. A moment later the Chinaman again demanded their attention.

"P'r'aps de massa and him friend smilee at de China boy," he said in engaging tones. "Me wishee to see how de mouths look, and then me tellee you if de dress and eberyting am allee nicee."

Once more did Tyler and his companion follow the wishes of Li Sung, and, turning towards him, opened their mouths and smiled, so as to show their coloured teeth. Then they walked up and down the clearing while he stared at them, his head still on one side, and his fingers grasping his pigtail.

"Massa and de friend of massa will do plenty fine," he said

at length. "Dey Dyaks now in eberyting but de tongue, and him dey can keep still. Li have done him best and am satisfied."

"And we too," responded Tyler. "But I have delayed long enough already, and will at once set out to reconnoitre. John, take command of the camp and of the tribe while I am gone. Li, you can come with me as far as the river, but after that you had better keep in the forest, for some of your old comrades might recognize you."

At once there was a stir in the camp, while those who were to accompany their leader hastily gathered their weapons together and prepared to march. Then one of the scouts who had returned with the news that the Sarebus river was at hand placed himself at the head of the little band and led them into the forest, their departure being watched with the greatest interest by all who remained behind. Indeed there was an air of excitement and of anticipation about all the warriors, for upon the report which their leader and his friends brought would depend their future actions, and no doubt their success. Had it not been for the fear that some of the enemy might be in the neighbourhood, hunting the forest for game, the tribesmen would have shouted their farewell to their leader, and would have accompanied him some distance on his journey. As it was, however, they remained in the camp, and at once set about placing themselves in a position of defence. As for Tyler, marching at the head of his little band, he could not help but be gratified by the willing obedience which each of the warriors gave him. That his change in costume had won him still more of their esteem was evident also, for they realized that he had made the alteration so as to assure the safety of the tribe. Stalking ahead of them, Tyler found his sandals even more comfortable than boots, while his light clothing, the fact that his limbs were freer now than ever before, and that the heat was so great that he had no feeling of being cold, made him more active than ever. About his shoulder he still carried his rifle, while

the betel-pouch at his waist was filled with ammunition. In his waist-cloth, hidden by the folds, were his revolvers, while a shield of enormous dimensions was slung to his back for the sake of appearances alone.

"Once within easy distance of the river we will search for a path," he said as Li Sung came up beside him. "Perhaps if the forest is very dense, as seems to be the case close to the rivers, we will hunt for a boat and borrow it. But then we should be more easily seen, and my aim and object is to remain unobserved. One thing I am particularly anxious to search for is a fleet of their prahus, for with boats at our command we could laugh at Hanns Schlott and all his men."

"But dere are de booms to be thought of," said the Chinaman. "Dey are below de forts, but sometimes, no one knowee when, dey am moved, and den no prahu can sail down de river."

"Nothing would stop a fleet of boats coming down with wind and stream," answered Tyler, undismayed by the prospect which the Chinaman had suddenly unfolded. "These booms will be made of bamboo and other trees, and will be chained to the banks by means of enormous posts. Very well, if the boom itself is too strong for us, we must hack the posts to pieces. But the weight of the fleet alone should be enough. However, that is a question for the future. For the present we have to think of the pirates and their lair, and before considering booms have to come across the prahus."

"Dat you will do plenty easy, massa. If de pirate at home de ships am dere also. But me tink dat all de men better go out into de forest and keep eye wide open."

"Then give them the order," said Tyler. "You and I will walk together, and they can keep up with us by following the sounds."

Accordingly the men who formed the party which had set out from the camp for the purpose of watching the enemy divided, and, plunging into the trees on either hand, quickly became lost to view. Nor was it possible to hear them, as a

general rule, so silent were they in their movements. At length, after a hot and weary tramp, the little band came upon a narrow stream, which the scout at once proclaimed to be part of the Sarebus river.

"We follow this for an hour," he said, "and then we strike the main channel. Another half-hour will bring us to another river, which forks with the one we shall be following, and with it pours into the wide bed of the water-way which is known as the Sarebus. There will our leader come upon the pirates, and at that spot he will see that they have a town and many forts. I myself was there in the early hours, and at once turned to come swiftly with the news. As for a path, there is one beside the larger of the streams, and we shall be able to make use of it. Is it our leader's wish that we push on?"

"Do so at once," answered Tyler, Li Sung interpreting the words. "We will halt when we come to the larger stream, and will then go more carefully."

Once again did the little party set forward, and, plunging through the trees, finally came to a spot where the smaller tributary emerged into a larger one, which in its turn discharged its contents into the main channel. And now each one prepared for instant flight or for hostilities, and, unslinging weapons, advanced in a crouching attitude beside the water.

"See, massa," suddenly whispered Li Sung when they had crept forward half a mile, "there are de huts and de stockades or forts. Dat am Paddi, de big place of de pirates, where all de gold and riches go, and where de slaves am kept. Me knowee him velly well, for it am dere dat China boy first taken when him captive, and from Paddi him pull down de river on de prahu, for de first time in him life living wid de pirates."

"And the next time you sail to the sea let us hope it will be more as your own master," murmured Tyler, scarcely able to repress his excitement at the sight of the stockades before

him. "But let us get to some more advantageous point from which we can look down upon this place which you say is called Paddi. Lead us into the bushes, Li, for you must know better than anyone where we shall be able to obtain the best view."

Emboldened by the fact that no one seemed to be stirring in the neighbourhood of the pirates' stronghold, and that not a single sampan or boat of any description ferried across the water, the party of scouts pressed on, led by the cunning Chinaman, and at length arrived at a spot which permitted them to look over the walls of the bamboo stockade which surrounded Paddi, and see all that was taking place within.

"One would almost imagine that the town had been deserted," remarked Tyler in a whisper, after staring into the stronghold for some minutes. "The huts seem for the most part to be empty, and so far I have seen only women and a few old men and children. What can it mean? Surely Hanns Schlott and his followers are not scared at the thought of our coming."

"De Dutchman am too wise and too bold for dat," answered Li Sung emphatically. "Him havee some little game. Him gone into de forest, p'r'aps, to find de white men and deir Dyak friends, or him at sea looking out for oder ships to makee up for de loss of de schooner. Him not deserted Paddi, dat China boy knowee for sure."

"For how long does he cruise away from this place?" asked Tyler thoughtfully, after another long interval during which his eyes were fixed upon the town which lay before him.

"P'r'aps one day, p'r'aps many. Li him not say for sure. If ships to be found in plenty outside, he stay dere and take dem every one."

"We might even destroy the whole stronghold," murmured Tyler to himself, "for it seems to me that it is practically without men. Of course I don't like the thought of attacking a place which has only women and children to defend it, but I would see that they were not harmed, and, after all, the

burning of this town would, I fear, be too big an undertaking. Li once said that there were other places on this river, and as they must be lower down it is probable that they would at once take the alarm, and their prahus would put out into the river to stop our escape. No, silence is what we must aim at, and a dark night would be the best, only navigation then of the water-way would be very difficult. As to Hanns Schlott and his men, it is clear that they are away on an expedition, though whether in search of ourselves or not it is difficult to decide. Where do you think that they have gone?" he suddenly demanded, turning upon the Chinaman.

"Dat Li can only guessee at, massa. But dere no prahus here, and so de China boy him tink dat de Dutchman and him Malays at sea looking along de coast in case de white man and him friends come dat way. Oders go into de forest and lie in wait along by de mountains. Scouts left between de two, and when we am found de news taken to both de parties."

That the question was difficult to decide was clear, and for long Tyler lay flat upon the ground, hidden in the undergrowth, thinking the matter out; and all the while his eyes were busily engaged in taking in every part of the town and forts of Paddi. Lying at the fork of the river, the huts in which the pirates lived were protected on the water side by stockades of bamboo, strongly erected and placed in most advantageous positions, so that the Sarebus was commanded for some hundreds of yards. In the rear there were other forts, but of less strength and importance, for attack from that direction could not be very dangerous, seeing that the forest was there of the densest, and would almost forbid the approach of an enemy. Stretching across the mouths of each of the tributaries which poured into the main channel, and between which lay the town, were two enormous booms, awash in the water, and half-covered with twigs and reeds which had been swept against them and caught. Each boom was anchored by means of chain-cable to a tree on either shore, while the same material bound the bamboos together.

"A heavy ship would soon break through," thought Tyler, "but to light boats the task would be a difficult one, and axes would be needed. But I doubt very much whether the pirates place their prahus above the booms. It is pretty certain that they anchor them in the river below, so as to be able to drop down stream without a moment's delay. But in case of attack in force by an enemy coming up the river I have little doubt that they would swing one of the booms aside for a time until all the prahus had passed through, and would then close it again. Well, nothing is stirring, and for the time we must be content to remain where we are and keep watch. If their fleet was here now I should call up all the tribe and let them lie in the forest while I told them off to the different boats. Then as soon as darkness fell we would slip aboard and float down-stream. Once in safety we would search for our friends, and if only the *Dido* came in sight would lead an attacking-party against the stronghold. Yes, that would be fine, but it is too bright a prospect to hope for. It is more than likely that we shall have to fight for our lives, and for the ships should the latter come upon the scene. Halloo!"

His exclamation, which was whispered in low tones, was caused by a movement on the part of Li Sung and the Dyaks who lay beside him; for of a sudden, while staring at the stronghold before them each had turned his head to the right, while an onlooker could see that they were listening intently.

"H-h-ush!" said the Chinaman, creeping closer to his leader. "We hearee plenty noise down de stream, and we tink dat de pirates come. Li him say dat de prahus am using de sweeps, and dat dere am many of dem. But waitee a little longer and we see all. P'r'aps de enemy returning home to search for us."

Lying there upon his face it was not long before Tyler too could distinguish some distant sounds, and soon these came to his ear as the splash of many oars. Then voices could be heard, sweeping up the surface of the water, though as yet

a bend in the banks of the Sarebus hid the oncomers from view. Ah! Each of the watchers gave vent to a gasp of surprise, for of a sudden a huge prahu came into sight, her decks loaded with dusky pirates, while, above, an immense spread of sail flapped loosely against her masts. On either side projected some twenty long sweeps, and, propelled by these, she was coming up the stream at a wonderful rate. In an instant Tyler recognized her as the vessel which had lain in the harbour of Singapore, and the one to which Hanns Schlott had retreated when beaten back by the Dyak tribe. Nor was it long before he caught sight of the rascally leader, the man who had murdered Mr. Beverley, for, thanks to the pace at which she was driven, the prahu was very quickly sweeping before them, and a glance showed the Dutchman standing in his old place at the helm, his eyes fixed upon the town of Paddi before him.

"He is anxious to learn whether there is any news of us," thought Tyler, "and I am sure that he has not the faintest notion that we are watching him at this moment. Wait, my friend, and I will show you that an English lad can beat you, even though you have so many villains to count upon and to come to your aid. But what is coming now?"

His gaze left the leading prahu and went back to the bend of the Sarebus, round which other vessels were now appearing. But on this occasion their progress was slower, though it seemed that they were employing a similar number of sweeps. But closer inspection soon showed the reason, for a rope was seen stretching taut behind the foremost to a second prahu, which again was made fast to a third.

"Towing something, a prize of some sort," said Tyler, "and in a few seconds we shall be able to see. Perhaps they have been making a raid upon some of the neighbouring towns, or have captured a prahu sailing with merchandise from Singapore. By Jove!"

A startled cry escaped his lips as another object came round the bend; and well it might, for, dragged into sight at the tail

of the last of the three prahus, came a vessel of European build, with high bulwarks and tapering masts, which seemed to strike against the trees which overhung the river. On her deck were some ten of the Malays, with long poles in their hands with which to propel her should she come to shallow water and show signs of holding there. In addition, four of their comrades had placed themselves in the bows, and were busily seeing to the anchor, preparing to let it go.

"Where could the ship have come from? Who was the owner, and what had became of the unfortunate crew?" Tyler found himself wondering vaguely, and attempting to find a solution to the questions. "The last is easy to reply to," he said bitterly. "Hanns and his rascals will have killed them without mercy, and will have thrown them overboard. But a European vessel! That must be a prize indeed, and adds another to the many serious crimes which Hanns Schlott has committed. But they are nearly at their berth, and we shall see what is to happen; and here are other prahus coming round the bend."

Breathless with excitement, and almost unable to remain still in hiding, he watched eagerly the scene taking place before his eyes. It was evident that the pirates were filled with elation at their capture, and that they had returned to their stronghold in the best of spirits, for they shouted to one another, and as the walls of the fort were lined with their women and children, they answered their cries of welcome with thunderous shouts of joy and triumph. Then, as the leading prahu came opposite the first of the stockades, and within a stone's-throw of the boom across the entrance to the river beside which Tyler was hiding, she was thrown into the wind, the sweeps were taken in, and an anchor dropped. Almost at the same moment a big sampan splashed from her deck and Hanns Schlott descended into it.

"Let all come to their moorings and bring our prizes ashore," he called out so loudly that the words came clearly to the ears of the watchers and were promptly interpreted by

Li Sung. "When we have had a meal we will see to that beggarly Englishman who is journeying this way, and I shall hope to hear from the men whom we sent towards the mountains that they have sighted them, and are merely awaiting our help to fall upon them and kill every one of the tribe, their leaders included."

Waving his arm to his followers he sprang into the sampan, his bulky weight causing the frail boat to rock dangerously and ship some water. Then the oarsman, who stood in the stern with a couple of long paddles, the handles of which crossed, bent to his work and ferried his leader to the forts. A minute later and the rascally Dutchman had disappeared behind the stockade, and later on was seen to enter the largest of the huts which lay inside. By now the remaining prahus had reached their moorings, and at once a busy scene ensued, the men dropping into their sampans, which the majority of the vessels had in tow, and taking the ropes to the barrels and kegs which floated on the surface of the river with an anchor or a heavy stone to hold them to the bottom. As for the big ship which had fallen a prize, her new crew kept her with head up-stream, and conscious that she would require more than a single anchor, for the stream came strong and swift, sent out a couple of extra cables which were made fast to trees which grew on the bank. Then they prepared to leave her and go to their homes.

"Let us hope that they will remain there over the night," said Tyler in a whisper, scarcely able to repress the excitement with which he was filled. "Or better, perhaps they will send off a large party to join those who have gone to the mountains in search of ourselves, leaving fewer for us to deal with. How many men do you think there are?"

"First count de prahus, massa, and den easy tell. Dey carry fifty to eighty on board, and sometimes more. Plenty men dere, massa."

At once Tyler and the Chinaman set to work to count the prahus assembled at their moorings, and, thanks to the fact

that all had come well round the bend, they had little difficulty at arriving at their correct numbers.

"Fifty-four prahus," said Tyler with something approaching a groan, for the odds were desperately against them. "With, say, sixty on board each there will be three thousand of the pirates to deal with, and we are only to be counted as about three hundred. The numbers are dreadfully against us, and were it not for the fact that we hope to take them at a disadvantage, and also that our object is to disappear when they shows signs of collecting together to attack in force, I should feel quite disheartened. But we shall see."

"And massa him must keep in him mind dat some of dese men havee gone to de mountains, and dat oders will follow dem. Den we plenty fine numbers to fight them, and de Dyaks show dem dat dey have something to punish dem for. Wait a little bitee, massa. De time comee velly velly soon for de Dyaks to shout and laugh, and for de pirate to run. Li him feel velly sure of dat."

The Chinaman gave a knowing nod, and once more turned to the prahus to go over each one again and count them on his fingers, while his slit-like eyes followed the movements of their crews closely as they prepared to leave.

"Dey all plenty fine spirit," he said suddenly, as though a thought had occurred to him. "Dey havee returned to deir place wid a velly great ship, and dey feel dat dey am rich. Wait, and massa see dat dey go to deir homes and make jolly. To-night dey dance and sing, and de women come round de watch-fires wid plenty to drink. Den, as de ashes die down, and all am cold and dark, dey creep into de hut and sleep like pig."

He looked at his young leader with an encouraging smile, and snored heavily, the better to show his meaning.

"To-night am de time for de Dyaks and for massa," he went on earnestly. "Dey creep to dis spot and dey wait and watch. Soon as de fires die down and de men crawl off to deir beds dey cross de river. Dey go to Paddi like de ghosts,

and only de night know. Den massa give one little signal, and ebery man of de tribe creep and run dis way and dat into de huts. Take velly little time to kill all of de pirates, and den de Dyaks smile and laugh. Dey go to de prahus, and dey cut de ropes. Den in de morning dey find demselves at sea, and plenty soon sail rightee to Sarawak."

Carried away by the thought of the possible victory in store for those in whose company he was, the Chinaman forgot for the moment his accustomed tranquillity. His usually impassive features became wrinkled as he indulged in a smile, while he turned to Tyler with questioning eyes as if to demand his approval.

"Can't be done," said the latter curtly, favouring him with a frown. "Englishmen do not fight in that manner, and I would never consent to killing a single one of the pirates while in his sleep. It would be murder, and that I cannot think of. No, I know well that they deserve such a death, for who can say how many poor unhappy people the ruffians have killed in cold blood? Who that does not know all of their doings can tell how many deaths they are responsible for, what miseries they have caused? But men of my country do not make war in such ways. Fight openly, if at all, is our motto, and it is one which I will carry out to the letter. There shall be no massacre, but if necessary we will fight them for the prahus, and do our best to beat them handsomely. As to their being overcome by wine to-night, I hope that that may be the case, for it will help us greatly. We will wait till they are quiet and will then steal upon their boats. If we are cautious and organize the movement well we shall be able to embark all the woman and children and each member of the tribe without making a sound and without alarming the pirates. Then we will cut the cables, as you suggested, and drift down upon the stream till we are in the open sea. After that Sarawak shall be our destination, where these poor Dyaks shall find a home. I shall have more to do then, for at the first opportunity I shall offer to be

the guide for an expedition to Paddi, with the object of hunting out these pests and of capturing their leader. But I see that the majority of the crews have already set foot ashore, and soon the prahus will be left to themselves."

Once more there was silence between them, the Chinaman lying there in perplexity, wondering at the words which his leader had given vent to.

"Not take advantage of the pirates, the men who had harmed the Dyaks so often and so severely, and slay them in their beds!" To this man of the East it was the maddest and strangest of decisions, and his cunning mind, trained to take advantage of an enemy in any manner, failed to grasp its meaning. "Could his young master have suddenly lost his wisdom?" he asked himself. "Was it possible that the sight of all these pirates had brought fear into his heart, so that he refused the only course open to brave men?" For long did Li Sung ponder over the matter till he was bound to confess that he was bewildered. Indeed, a very little consideration had shown him that the Englishman, who alone had attacked the mias, was not the one to be so easily scared, and then, all through the march, it was Tyler who had shown coolness and courage, and whose fine example of cheerfulness and whose bright view of the future had encouraged the tribe of Dyaks, and had converted them from a downtrodden dispirited race to one which was filled with energy and with confidence in themselves.

"Li Sung him not see velly fine how you not do as him say," he whispered in tones of perplexity, taking his pigtail in his hand and twisting it into a knot. "If not fall on de pirate when him sleep, and when him heavy wid wine, den dey allee escape and de Dutchman come to worry us again."

"When we shall be fully prepared for him," answered Tyler with a smile. "It is useless to suggest such a course as a wholesale massacre, for it is one which I will never consent to. We will beat them fairly and handsomely, and once

we join our friends we will throw our lot in with theirs and will help them to exterminate these rascals. But I think that it is almost time that we were moving in the direction of our friends, for if we are to make the attempt to capture their boats to-night we shall have little time to lose. Signal to the other men, Li Sung, and tell them to make ready."

"One little minute, massa. De big ship not empty, and Li him tink dat dere someting dere to keep us. De Malays still on board, and dey have shouted for anoder sampan. Perhaps dey bring de bags of gold which dey have captured from de English, and look, massa, me see de name of de ship."

He pointed to the stern of the captured vessel, which had swung round with the stream sufficiently to allow the name painted there to be legible, and instantly Tyler read *The Queen*, Liverpool.

"English!" he gasped. "Then there is all the more reason why I should take her from these men. But wait. What is happening?"

As he spoke, the remaining Malays came running upon deck and went towards the side where the sampan lay, with something in their midst. Arrived at the rail they lifted their burden over and returned to the companion ladder which led to the cabin, only to repeat the same movement. Then two of their number swung themselves into the boat and began to paddle her to the shore. A minute later the little sampan had swung clear of the vessel's side, and was visible to the watchers, who at once gave vent to cries of surprise.

"Prisoners!" exclaimed Tyler, starting to his knees and thrusting his head so far between the leaves that Li Sung placed a warning hand upon his arm. "White prisoners, too, and, as I live, they are not men."

"The one is little more than a babe, massa," broke in the Chinaman, "while the other is a woman of twenty years."

Not daring to move, lest they should attract attention to themselves, and yet filled with eagerness to rush forth and rescue the hapless prisoners who had fallen into the hands of the pirates, Tyler and his followers watched with staring eyes as the sampan was rowed to the shore. They saw a little girl of some seven years of age lifted from the boat, and gazed with saddened faces as she turned with outstretched hand to clasp that of the young woman who accompanied her. Then they watched as the two white and forlorn figures were led into the stockade and were ushered into a hut.

"Time to be returning," said Tyler suddenly, and in such determined tones that the Chinaman was startled. "Give the word and let us hurry."

Without waiting for his followers' he sprang to his feet and went off through the jungle, his brow deeply furrowed and his mind full of the last scene which he had witnessed.

CHAPTER XI

A Midnight Encounter

SIX hours and more had passed since Tyler and his little band of Dyak followers had witnessed the passage of the two helpless captives from the English vessel to the pirates' stronghold, and already darkness had fallen over the island of Borneo. The scream of thousands of parrots, the chatter and hoarse voice of many a monkey, had ceased for the night, while the hush of the forest, which but for birds and monkeys would have been almost unbroken during the hot day, had now been replaced by the buzz and hum of myriads of insects, and by the calls and weird cries of other denizens of the jungle whose habit it was to set out during the hours of darkness in search of their food.

What were those objects filing in and out between the trees, each so ghost-like and so silent? Were they human beings lost in the jungle, or a collection of wild beasts? Well might the question have been asked, had anyone happened to catch sight of them, for they came without so much as a sound, each one treading noiselessly where the other had been, all bent low as if to escape the overhanging boughs, and everyone with eyes which glared into the depths of the dark forest. Occasionally the weird note of some animal in advance came to their ears, and instantly they lifted their heads for a second, and then changed their direction. In front marched a lithe and active leader, and happening to emerge at that moment from the darkness of the forest the pale rays of a small moon, which had risen early and would soon be gone, fell upon him and showed that it was Tyler. Then these were, after all,

human beings, and none other than the tribe of Dyaks who were on their way to Sarawak. Yes, led by our hero, who had returned from the haunt of the pirates, the Dyaks were on their way to the spot before which floated the fleet of prahus upon the possession of which their safety depended.

"Remember the orders," said Tyler, as he emerged into the clearing, turning to a swarthy native beside him, whose features bore an unmistakable resemblance to those possessed by John Marshall. "We arrive at the place agreed upon, and the men at once divide as already arranged. Then the leaders of the companies come to me and we discuss the situation. After that we set about the embarkation without delay. Now get back to your own men, for they will miss you."

With an involuntary lift of his hand to his head, as was the custom aboard ship, the boatswain turned in obedience to the order, and threaded his way through the trees till he arrived at the rear of the procession, where he sat down till the tribe moved forward again. Meanwhile Tyler stood in the centre of the clearing, waiting till his scouts brought news that no one was at hand.

"We can advance in safety again," said Li Sung some minutes later, as a dusky figure crept silently to their side and whispered something in the Chinaman's ear. "De report of de man sent to de front is dat de forest am alone, and dat de pirate shout and makee merry."

"Then lead the way again," was Tyler's curt answer, "and let us not stop until we are in position. All this waiting is trying, and I am sure that we shall all be glad when we are in sight of our object."

Once more the column of ghost-like figures pushed on into the jungle, and, undismayed by the noise of distant revelry, which soon came to their ears, at length arrived at the spot from which the landing of Hanns Schlott and his men had been watched. And here the tribe settled itself in the undergrowth with such readiness that it was easy to tell that they had been drilled to the movement.

"The women and children are together?" asked Tyler of John, as the latter came to his side. "And there are an equal number of men to help them to embark?"

"Jest as you said, sir. The poor things is crouching there in the bush, a shiverin' at the noise them pirates is makin' and wondering what'll happen to 'em and their babies. But it'll be all right in the end, for I reckon that we're jest goin' to give that chap Hanns Schlott the slip, and sail right away without his being a penny the wiser. What's next, sir?"

"Wait and watch till those fellows are silent and have turned in for the night. Then we will see about the prahus. There should be no delay about that part of the work, for the men have been told off, and they know exactly how many of the vessels we mean to take. You see, as I returned from this spot I thought the whole matter out, and I could see at once that if we were to arrive before the pirate's stronghold without any plans for escape, everything would be muddled in the darkness, and the alarm probably given. As you say, John, we want to get clear away without a suspicion reaching the Dutchman, and we shall feel all the more successful if we contrive that not one of our tribe is overlooked and left behind for the pirates to kill. It was for that reason that I suggested practising the embarkation, and, thanks to that precaution, I think that each and every one knows the work he has to do. Once those fellows go to bed we shall swim across to their sampans, and while some return to this shore, the remainder will lie down and prepare to beat back the enemy should they take the alarm."

"And that's my partic'lar part of the job," exclaimed John Marshall quickly. "It's jest the one to suit me, too, for I owe 'em one and hope to repay it."

"If they attack, you will give them trouble, no doubt," said Tyler sternly. "But recollect, there must be no noise on any account, and however much you desire to come to blows with these men of the river, you are to avoid doing so on this occasion if you possibly can. Later on, when we

have joined in with those of Sarawak, you may have an opportunity. Indeed, I sincerely hope that you will. But for this time silence is essential. And now to go on with our plans; and by the way, John, if I have missed a point be sure to tell me of it. We line the farther shore, and half our numbers return with some of the sampans. The embarkation then commences, and when it is ended, those who can be spared go to the empty prahus and scuttle them, cutting them adrift when the signal is given. When word reaches me that all is ready—"

"You'll come to us, and we'll get aboard the sampans and join our friends," whispered John, giving vent to a low chuckle which denoted his pleasure at the prospect. "And then we'll up anchor and away. I guess that the stream'll carry us clear of the banks, and if we do happen to hit up against one, it won't matter so very much, for the mud will do our timbers no harm, and a push with a couple of poles will soon send us off again. Then we'll be in the ocean afore you can turn yer head."

"Quite so," replied Tyler calmly; "but before that happens we have another little matter to carry out. You have forgotten the woman and the child, my friend."

"But you ain't—" gasped the boatswain, peering into his face as well as the darkness would permit. "You don't mean to say as though you're thinkin' of them. Why—"

Evidently the idea of such a project had never entered the sailor's head, and no wonder, considering the magnitude of the task which he and his young leader had set themselves. And now that all was settled, and it almost seemed that they were at the end of their long and arduous journey, something else had cropped up to delay them and endanger their safety.

"But what about the tribe? Suppose you get nabbed by that 'ere Hanns!" he said, swinging round upon Tyler as the thought startled him. "It's risking a lot for the sake of two whom yer never did more than set eyes on. Are yer sure yer mean it, sir?"

"Quite!" was Tyler's emphatic answer. "We cannot retire from this place and leave them to their fate. The thing is impossible! As for risk, of course there is that, and it will be increased by the attempt to enter the stronghold. But, then, the alarm will not in that case come so early as to ruin all our plans, for the bulk of the tribe will be embarked, and a cut with a sword will set the prahus free. Pursuit on the part of this gang of rascals will be out of the question, as we shall have taken the majority of their vessels, while the remainder will, I hope, be at the bottom of the river. So that we should only have to face the pirates who live below, and I think that we can do that cheerfully."

"We'd beat them and more like 'em," exclaimed the boatswain with energy. "But what about yerself? Ain't you runnin' the chance of getting took by the Dutchman? in which case he'd make an end of yer on the spot."

"One must expect danger in such cases, and must consider whether the rescue of those poor captives is worth it," responded Tyler calmly. "For my part I should be ashamed to meet James Brooke of Sarawak or the commander of the *Dido* if I were to leave this spot without making at least an attempt. Why, consider their position, John. Two poor, helpless things at the mercy of these men!"

"Ay, and one of 'em's a child, and t'other ain't no more than twenty," murmured the sailor. "You're right, sir, and I oughtn't never to have wanted yer to clear from the river without taking them with yer. Yer couldn't do it, as yer say. Them shipmates what'll be yours as soon as yer reach the *Dido* wouldn't forgive yer for such a act. And how can I help yer?"

"By remaining at your post on the farther shore, and by rushing forward if there is trouble. If not, all that you will have to do will be to see the poor things safely on board one of the prahus, and then follow at your best pace. On the other hand, if I am discovered, and the pirates rush down in force, you and your men will have to take to the river and

leave me to myself. After all, the safety of the whole tribe must not be endangered for the life of one man."

"It all depends on who he is," was John's dogged reply. "If jest one of themselves, p'r'aps not. If their leader, the chap as come along to save 'em in the first place from these here fellers, the one what's led 'em all this distance, why, I tell yer that they won't move till you're dead or with 'em. But it ain't coming to that, sir. You'll manage to rescue them two without giving so much as a sound, and we'll all find ourselves in Sarawak afore we can think it possible. We've everything jest cut and dried, and as soon as them 'ere fellers'll clear off to bed we'll set to at the job."

Having come to a decision on the matter, and settled every point which occurred to them, the two lay silently upon the bank, their eyes fixed upon the blazing fires beyond, and upon the outline of the stockade which stood out clearly against the dark background of the forest. That the Malays, and their friends the sea Dyaks, were making merry was very evident, for they lay about the blazing logs in great numbers, while the women tended to their wants. As for the Dutchman, the night was too hot to allow of his eating in comfort within the large shed which he occupied when at the stronghold, and instead, he sat at a roughly-improvised table, composed of a large packing-case, which was placed before his door. Before him burnt a bright fire, while several of the native women hung about him, bringing food and wine to his board. So clearly, indeed, was he outlined by the light that it might have been possible to pick him off with a rifle, and Tyler even lifted his weapon to his shoulder. An instant later, however, he had dropped it with an exclamation of disgust, and once more contented himself with watching the Dutchman.

"It would be like murdering the lot in their beds," he said to himself, "just the thing that would appeal to men of his class and to fellows like Li Sung, who know no better and who are brought up to that way of killing their enemies.

But to an Englishman it is impossible, and besides, the shot might and might not be successful, while it would certainly give the alarm and bring a hundred and more of the pirates rushing across in this direction. Ah, there is food going to the prisoners! So that it is clear that they are to be well treated for the time being. I will watch what is happening."

As he spoke, two women advanced across the open space which was enclosed by the bamboo stockade, and, arriving at the tiny hut which harboured the captives, entered with a platter of food and a gourd of water. Ten minutes later they emerged again, dragging the woman with them, while the child followed behind, weeping bitterly at the scene.

"Brutes!" thought Tyler; "but I am sure that the captives' lives are not threatened, for otherwise they would not have fed them. Ah, they are being taken to the Dutchman!"

Directing their steps to the spot where Hanns Schlott sat, the native women dragged their captive up to his table and forced her to seat herself upon a box close at hand; then they stood beside her while the leader of the pirates spoke with her, and amused himself at the obvious terror under which she laboured. As for the child, she clung to her white companion, and stood looking at the man who had suddenly come so prominently into her life as if he were a monster, as indeed he was.

"The Dutchman is jeering at them, that is evident," said Tyler to himself, as he looked on at the distant scene. "I only wish that I was beside him to hear what he was saying, so that I could punish him later on. One would have thought that any man would have taken pity upon those poor things, but he is a hardened villain, and I really believe that they would receive better treatment from the natives. Now he is sending them back, and let us hope that very soon he and his followers will take themselves off to their beds."

For three hours in succession did our hero and his followers lie in the jungle with their eyes glued upon the distant lair of the pirates. Indeed it seemed as though Hanns Schlott and

his men had made up their minds to sit the hours of darkness out, and to indulge in revelry till morning came, for they made no movement to go to their huts, and instead remained grouped about the fires.

"Supposing they stayed there till daylight came? What if they never went to their beds, but as soon as morning was come jumped into their sampans and entered the forest in search of fruit or some other food."

Tyler asked himself the questions, and sat bolt upright as he puzzled for an answer. Then he sank back into his old position with an air of resignation.

"Then they must look to themselves," he said to himself. "If they come this way they will certainly discover us, and we shall have to fight for our lives. But it occurs to me that they would be taken by surprise, and that they might easily think that we were another lot of pirates attacking them, and not the fugitives whom they are hoping to waylay on their journey to Sarawak. That being the case we must take a bold course, and I shall at once make for the prahus. All the men and many of the women and children can swim as well as they can walk, and we will dive into the river without delay. A few minutes should see us masters of the fleet of prahus, and little time would be taken in embarking the remainder of our party. Then we would sail for the sea, and trust to our men to beat off any who might follow. Yes, now that I come to think of the matter I am sure that a bold course will pay us best, though, if possible, we will get away without discovery; for their numbers are very large, while ours are small. Then again, by putting off the attack we shall be able perhaps to return on a later date, and with a European force, when I feel sure that the days of the pirates will be ended. But Hanns is moving. The rascal is going to talk with his men."

Rising from the rough table at which he had eaten, the Dutchman walked across the clearing and entered into conversation with his men. Evidently he had something pleasant

to propose, for they all sprang to their feet and set up a shout of joy. Then some of their number raced off to a certain portion of the stronghold, and returned very shortly with enormous jars upon their shoulders.

"Drink to our success!" shouted Hanns Schlott, motioning to all to help themselves. "Drink death to the hated Englishmen who have escaped us so far, and a quick end to all who may try to oppose us in the open sea. We are the only men in and about Borneo, and I am the only leader who can bring you fortune and much gold. Fill up, then, and drink to the future."

Waiting till all had filled the rough gourds which did duty for mugs, the Dutchman lifted his glass to his lips and drained it at a draught. Then he repeated the process with a swaggering air, and having done so strolled off to his seat once more.

"Now enjoy yourselves!" he shouted out as he retired. "There is wine in plenty, so do not spare it, for the English ship has a big store to replace what you may happen to use. Drink, then, and dance, for now you have the time, while to-morrow you will be marching through the jungle on the way to catch the white-faces, and those who were foolish enough to throw in their lot with them. For myself, I have much to think of, for remember, your safety, your success depend upon me. And therefore I will retire at once, leaving you to follow at your wish."

With a lordly wave of the hand he went to his hut and disappeared within, leaving his men to themselves. Nor were they slow in following his advice as to making merry, for up to now they had but lain basking in the heat of the numerous fires which blazed in the clearing. Now, however, stimulated by the extra allowance of wine, and by the thought that there was more to follow, they leapt to their feet and began to dance in circles, while their womenfolk beat time upon the ground with their hands. And when one lot of natives were exhausted, and had thrown themselves upon the earth beside the fires, to lie there panting till refreshment was brought

them, others sprang to take their places, and the mad dance was carried on.

Strange, indeed, was the sight, and for long did Tyler and his men look on, though to John Marshall and to his leader it was one which they had never witnessed before. As if fascinated they watched as the pirates flung their limbs into the air and swung their arms aloft, while they wondered how long they would be able to continue, and where came the pleasure of such rapid movement. Then each one began to observe that less energy was displayed, while some of the dancers had entirely given in, and lay as if asleep upon the ground.

"The drink telling," whispered John Marshall. "Them chaps'll be asleep afore very long, and then it'll be our turn to play the tune. I reckon it's getting towards morning, too; so the sooner they go off the better it'll be. How long will yer give 'em to settle, sir?"

"No more than half an hour. By then the majority will be asleep, and we shall only have the women to fear. Besides, the first part of our work should be carried out noiselessly, while the tribe should be embarked without giving any alarm. It is during the last part, when I attempt to enter the stronghold, that we shall have to be most cautious, and it is then that we can expect trouble."

"A fig for the trouble, sir!" cried John Marshall, snapping his fingers. "Them fellers is too much overcome already to be able to do much fighting, and if it comes to hand-grips with them, why, I reckon I know who'll get the best of the scuffle. Don't you worry, Mr. Richardson, for if they drop upon you when you're inside, me and the men with me will rush in and bring you out. Hist! Didn't I hear something over there? Listen and see if you can't make it out."

At once he became rigid in every limb, while his eyes seemed to start from their sockets. Then he stretched across to where Tyler was crouching, and taking him by the arm, directed his attention to the second of the two booms, which

guarded the other river at the point where it flowed into the main channel of the Sarebus.

"Someone moving there," said our hero decidedly. "A boat, I think, though it is so dark in that direction that one cannot distinguish anything. There! I heard a splash as if a sampan had been dropped into the water, or an anchor had been let go. Hush!"

"And them's voices," came from the boatswain in the lowest of whispers. "You can hear 'em coming over the water as plain as if they was alongside of this very spot. What'll it be? Pirates come to have a fight with these here fellers? or friends?"

"Dey friends, I tink," said a voice at their side, causing Tyler and his companion to give a start of surprise. "Li Sung and de Dyak hear dem plenty time ago as dey float down de oder river, and from de very first we tink dat dey de men who am sent to de mountains to meet us. P'r'aps not, but me feel velly certain."

"Then they must have had some reason for returning," exclaimed Tyler anxiously, "for, no doubt, their orders were strictly to the effect that they were to lie in wait till we came along, and then send news to the stronghold, while they followed our tracks. This is serious, for it proves that they know more than we gave them credit for. Can they have already discovered that we have made directly in this line with the intention of falling upon their ships? Or do they imagine, because they have not seen us near the mountain range, that we have turned back and abandoned the journey?"

"Me cannot say, but me velly sure dem am de ones de Dutchman send off to de mountain," repeated the Chinaman with an emphatic wag of his head. "But keep little silence and velly soon we hear, for dey go into de stockade and speak to deir friends."

Conscious that they could do nothing for the present, for as yet the revellers still lounged before their fires, and a sudden dash upon the ships would have been doomed to

failure, Tyler and his friends crouched in the jungle, fretting at the delay, chafing at the thought that even now something might have occurred to upset all their carefully-prepared plans, and with minds filled with anxious forebodings. And behind them, in every attitude, crouched the remainder of their followers, a prey for the most part to vague fears, which, in spite of their new spirit and of the fact that they had a trusted leader, would assail them however much they fought to be brave.

Would these men, these new-comers, join with their brothers and spend the night in revelry, or would they go to their huts at once and rest after an arduous march? The questions troubled Tyler considerably, and think as he would he could find no solution, for as yet it was not even certain that the men who manned the vessel which had just brought-to against the farther boom, and whose voices had been heard across the water, were those who had been sent to the mountains to waylay the Englishman and his Dyak followers. Perhaps they would turn out to be friends on a visit to the pirates.

Then did these rovers of the river and sea possess any who could be called by that name? Could any of their neighbours trust them sufficiently, or be trusted by the Dutchman and his men?

"It is out of the question," said Tyler to himself. "If these fellows were on a visit they would send someone ahead to announce their coming, for otherwise it is more likely that a bullet or the contents of one of those brass cannon which are mounted on the stockade would greet them. It is clear that they belong to Hanns Schlott and his gang, and that being the case I shall be astonished if they do not prove to be the ones sent to capture us or to gain tidings of our approach. But if so, why have they returned?"

With head firmly held between his hands he endeavoured to think the matter out and come to a satisfactory conclusion. Then with a gesture of disgust he put it aside, and,

uncovering his eyes, again stared in the direction of the second river.

"The future must tell," he whispered in John's ear. "We will wait patiently, and should it turn out that these men are from the mountains, and know of our presence near at hand, we will at once set about the capture of the prahus and the embarkation of the tribe. That done we shall be able to sail away to the sea, where we can laugh at them. At least, you and the others will be able to do so."

"And what about yerself, sir?" demanded John Marshall with a start, turning upon him suddenly and peering anxiously into his face. "Ain't you a-coming? Do yer mean to say that after all you've gone through you mean to get left behind? I reckon it would be murder. It's suicide, and nothing else."

He gave vent to an indignant snort, and lay there staring into the darkness in the direction of the new-comers, as if he could not trust himself to look any longer at his leader. A moment later, however, he had swung his head round again and had grasped Tyler by the wrist.

"What's the game?" he demanded roughly, and in a curiously hoarse whisper. "Still thinkin' of the kid and her nurse? What are yer after?"

"I'm considering their case," was Tyler's cool answer. "I have put myself in their position and asked myself whether I should like to be deserted under the circumstances. Then I have imagined that I am someone else, who is the leader on this occasion, and I have wondered what he'd do in such a case."

"Do! He'd clear with a whole skin as a general rule!"

"And what action would you take, John, if you were in my shoes? Imagine that for a few seconds, and recollect that as the leader you would be responsible for the safety of each and every member before you thought of a haven for yourself. The child and the woman, who, I suppose, is her nurse, are there. We saw them put into the hut, and we have already

made them part of our following. Would you desert them and leave them in the clutches of that tiger?"

It was Tyler's turn now to face his companion in the darkness, and address him as though he had a grievance. It was he who now spoke curtly and with roughness. Placing his lips close to the sailor's ear he spoke sternly and shortly, in such determined tones that John Marshall was amazed and astounded.

"Well?" Tyler demanded curtly again of the boatswain. "You are the leader for the moment; will you clear from the spot and save your own miserable skin, or will you hang back for the sake of the child and the woman?"

There was a long pause ere the silence was broken between them, and all the while John Marshall stared across at the blazing fires and at the figures of the pirates lying about them. He heard as if in a dream the sounds made by those who had lately put in an appearance, and watched listlessly for their appearance in the stockade. But he was thinking of someone else. In his mind's eye he pictured the child of seven, and the woman, the only survivors of those who had been aboard the English ship, and he remembered that they were of his own country, strangers, and helpless strangers at that, in a foreign country, without friends to help them, unless he and his bold young leader went to the rescue, and took them from the clutches of Hanns and his men.

What if he, John Marshall, of the mercantile marine, who prided himself upon the fact of being a British sailor and a man, together with his friend, Tyler Richardson, had failed to catch sight of the prisoners? What if, knowing them to be so close at hand, they deserted them and left them to their fate?

The boatswain almost started to his feet as this new side of the question occurred to him; but a moment later he was lying down again, with his face close to Tyler's.

"We'd be thunderin' curs!" he blurted out with a curious catch in his breath. "You and me stands alone between them

two and a life of misery. And I was for making off with me tail between me legs! Bah, John Marshall, you ain't half the chap you think!"

His disgust was so great that the better to express it he would have brought his fist violently against the ground had not discretion suddenly arrested his arm in the midst of the movement.

"Might wake 'em up over there," he said, as if to himself. "We can't afford to be doin' that, for we've got to rescue the kid and the woman. What's the idea, sir?"

"There is no idea as yet, John. All depends upon the pirates and their friends who have lately arrived. If they settle down for the night we shall be able to go on with the original programme. If not, then we must see what can be done. But I will take all away or remain myself. Supposing it is possible to embark the tribe, but we cannot get at the captives, then I propose to remain behind in the forest, and try on another occasion, or while they are absent in pursuit. But, steady! Something is occurring over there, and we had better listen."

Becoming silent at once they leaned as far towards the bank of the river as the undergrowth would permit, and watched the spot where the prahu had moored beside the boom. Thanks to the fires which blazed in the central portion of the stockade, they were soon able to make out her sails and her exact position, and even imagined that they could observe the crew who still remained on board. Some minutes later there was a movement amongst the latter, who disappeared from sight, only to reappear within a short space of time at the entrance to the stockade. And here they found nothing to prevent their moving forward, for no enemies were expected, and, safe in the thought that they were too powerful to fear a sudden attack, the pirates had neglected, as was their wont, to close the gap which led through the timbers of the stockade. With a shout some eighty men ran forward to the fires, and at once mingled with their comrades.

"The gate is open. You observe that?" whispered Tyler in accents of delight. "If they do not trouble to close it I shall have little difficulty in entering where those men went, and in bringing the captives out by the same way. What is going to happen now?"

"They have news, sir, and that's what's troubling 'em. I reckon they'll soon bring the Dutchman out of his bed."

That something out of the ordinary had occurred was very obvious, for whereas those of the pirates who had been lounging about the fires had at first greeted their comrades who had just arrived with nonchalance and with a few questions as to their success and as to the cause which had brought about their return, now they had all endeavoured to leap to their feet, and had set up a babel of shouts. Some, however, had indulged in the wine which their leader had given them to such an extent that they were beyond caring, and lay as still as logs. But many were not so stupefied that they could not realize that something out of the ordinary had happened, and crowding about their brothers they gave vent to shouts which were louder and more angry on account of their condition.

"We took it for granted that you had killed them all, that you were amongst us again with a tale to tell," cried one of them plaintively. "And now you come amongst us at a time when we are tired out with our day of work, and when we are about to sleep, and fill our ears with news which should make us feel alarm. Surely you are mistaken. You have allowed yourselves to be misled, for it is madness to imagine that those white fools would dare to come this way."

"There is no madness about it so far as we can see," was the answer of the one who had been the leader of the returned party. "What is more natural than that these men should take the most direct line? for otherwise, by going by way of the mountains, they would increase the length of their journey by a great deal, a matter of much importance when we have news that women and children accompany them. Then again,

by making for the river they run the chance of obtaining boats; and remember, my comrade, to desperate men the idea of capturing prahus from the very people whom they have to fear is not an impossibility."

"Run away with our prahus! Take them from beneath our very noses! Why, what can you have been doing? Surely you and those who went with you have come upon a store of wine like ourselves, and have indulged so freely that your minds are disturbed. Capture our fleet indeed! A beggarly handful of starving Dyaks, with women and children to feed and protect, and a couple of white-faces to lead them. The idea is laughable!"

The man shouted the words at his companion, and then turned to his comrades with a disdainful laugh and a half-drunken grimace which set them roaring.

"He will say soon that we are in danger," broke in another, pushing his way to the front, "and he will bid us fly to our wives to beg protection from them. Quickly let me find my way to my own particular hut, where dwells a woman who works hard all through the day, and has gained thereby such strength that she will be able to beat off all whom the white-faces may send."

He staggered away through the crowd, who stepped aside with many a guffaw and roar of laughter, and went towards one of the huts near by. As for his comrades, they enjoyed the joke immensely. It suited their mood to a nicety, and, determined to make the most of it and enjoy themselves to the full, they again crowded about the new-comers and plied them with questions.

"Shall we run now? And where can we go?" demanded one of them, making pretence to be full of terror.

"Do you say that we ourselves should get aboard the fleet at once, dragging with us those who lie insensible about the fires, and sail for the sea? There is much of the ocean outside, and there we might even manage to escape these dangerous men!"

"And then, when they had in their largeness of heart decided to be merciful, and had retired from this spot, we might even venture to return to our homes," said the one who had first spoken, giving vent to a sneer. "But come, my friends, admit that this is madness, or we shall quarrel. Say that you are in error, and join us in our jollity."

"We will do neither," was the indignant reply. "Here are we, returned after much trouble and full of weariness, and you jeer at us and tell us that we are fools. Were it not that you are our brothers we would chastise you as you deserve."

The threat, to men in the excited condition of the pirates, who had been lying about the fires and drinking the Dutchman's wine, was one which could not be easily passed over, and besides, all belonged to a race accustomed to bloodshed, and ready at any moment to resent an insult or to repay a wrong with violence. Hardly, therefore, had the words left the lips of the speaker than the two parties were on the verge of a conflict. Glaring at one another as though they were the worst of enemies, each member of the piratical gang seized the kriss which was thrust in his waist-cloth and flashed it in the firelight. A little more and angry words would have led to bloodshed had not an interruption occurred. Fortunately for the gang, the noise of the altercation had come to the Dutchman's ears, and just as blows were about to be exchanged he came from his hut, looking dishevelled and as though he had but just risen from his bed, as was the case. In an instant he realized what was about to happen, and rushing forward with an angry shout he threw himself upon the men, buffeting them, and kicking those within reach of his foot unmercifully.

"Dogs!" he shouted wrathfully. "Have I not told you often and often that there is to be no quarrelling, that you are to do no fighting except at my bidding? Put your weapons away, then, or some of you shall be shot as the dawn breaks. And now what is the trouble? What has caused you all to lose your tempers? Ah, I see that those who were sent to the mountains have returned! Then you have good news.

You have come up with this tribe of runaways, and have killed them. Where are the heads of those white men?"

He started back in his astonishment when the leader of the party told him that he and his companions had failed to discover the tribe under Tyler's command, but that they had ascertained that they were making direct for the very river where Hanns Schlott and his gang had their head-quarters, perhaps with the intention of attacking.

"We tracked them to within a very few miles," said the man, "and they may even now be lying near at hand about to fall upon us. For that reason we returned here at once and gave our warning to these men. But they are fools, or rather their brains are dulled with the wine which they have been drinking."

"And you will tell me that this white man and his tribe will attack us here?" said Hanns Schlott suddenly, breaking into a derisive laugh. "Go to your beds, men. It is clear that you are tired, or you would realize that sane men do not put their heads into the open mouth of a lion; you would see that attack from a puny force of three hundred at the most is not to be feared by one which numbers more than three thousand. Get to your huts, for a sleep will do you good. As for you other drunken dogs, it is time that you, too, retired. To your couches, then, and let us pass the remainder of the night in peace."

Without a second look in their direction he strode off to his own abode, while his followers obeyed his orders like beaten curs, showing that they held their Dutch leader in great fear. Soon the clearing was deserted, and but for the fires, which were fast burning down, and for one or two unconscious figures beside them, the stockade was deserted, all having retired to their huts.

"And now comes the time for us," said Tyler in a voice which trembled, so greatly was he excited. "Li Sung, you can go back to your men now that you have told me all that went on over there, and you can send the signal round. In

three minutes the first company will be at the edge of the water."

Gathering up his pigtail, the Chinaman slunk off into the darkness, and ere long some fifty dusky and silent figures were creeping to the bank of the Sarebus. A low hoot sounded in the night, and at the signal the Dyak warriors, with Tyler and John Marshall at their head, lay flat upon their faces and crept forward into the water. There was no wading, for that would undoubtedly have given rise to much splashing. Instead, each one immersed his body at once, and creeping along through the mud was quickly in deep water. Then, breasting the stream, they turned to the shelving bank above which was erected the bamboo stockade enclosing the huts of the pirate gang.

CHAPTER XII

Captain of a Fleet

"HALT!" The whispered word of command to which Tyler gave vent once he and his followers had set foot upon the opposite bank was scarcely necessary, so well did each man understand his duties, and so sensibly did they act. But Li Sung interpreted the order, and instantly some fifty dripping figures came to a stand-still and dropped full length upon the mud.

"Advance those who have to keep watch and beat back the enemy," said Tyler, with difficulty keeping calm. "John, that is your command. Post the men so as to hold the entrance, and look out for me when I come. Now for the boat party."

Leading half the company to the left, he took them to the spot where the sampans were drawn up on the beach, and stood by while the men carried the tiny boats down into the water. Then, as silently as ghosts, they pushed off from the bank, half the number making direct for the opposite shore, while the remainder drifted down-stream to the prahus.

"Commence to embark the women and children and the remaining men," said Tyler, as soon as the party which he had accompanied had reached the opposite bank. "Let there be no crushing or pushing. Each will come down in turn and be rowed to the prahus. Men last of all, as a general rule; only, as soon as one of the vessels is filled, the crew will be put on board, so as to be prepared to manœuvre it should the alarm be given. Quickly, please, for the morning is dangerously near at hand."

Standing beside the spot where the sampans had been drawn up, he watched as the Dyak women and children embarked, enjoining strict silence upon all of them. But they had been well drilled to the movement, and, thanks to that, they all passed swiftly and without confusion from their hiding-place in the jungle above to the sampans, and in the latter to the prahu selected for them. Once a certain number were on board, the sampans returned for a crew of men, and thus in an incredibly short space of time all but the half-company watching beside the stockade, and those who had gone amongst the fleet of prahus, were safely on board awaiting the order to let go. But there was still something else to do, and all watched anxiously as they realized that the stockade was to be entered, and that the figure of a man crawling across the firelit clearing would be that of their leader.

"Now for the two captives," said Tyler in matter-of-fact tones, when the embarkation had been carried out to his satisfaction. "I feel satisfied now that the larger proportion of the tribe will make good its escape, for they are on board, and even if the alarm be given now, they are safe from Hanns Schlott and his friends. Even at this moment I think I see some of the prahus sinking, and certainly more than one has been cut from its moorings and is floating away upon the river, and gradually getting lower. That being the case, the Dutchman and his friends will have to swim after us if they discover our trick, for we shall leave nothing. And now for the captives."

For a few moments he stood up in the sampan, while Li Sung went ashore with some of the Dyaks and hunted carefully through the jungle near at hand, lest by chance some child should have been overlooked, or one of the women, tired out by the long journey which she had borne so well, and by this long night of anxious watching and waiting, should have fallen asleep and remained behind, forgetful of the fact that her sisters were embarking.

"That is well," he said in tones of satisfaction, when the Chinaman had returned with the report that not a soul was to

be seen, and that the jungle was untenanted. "We can now see to the other matter. Li, you will come with me to the other shore, while the men here who have managed the embarkation will ferry their boats after us, and will lie off the bank prepared to come in close and take the remainder of the party off. Tell them that they are to leave an interval between each sampan, so as to have plenty of room in case of having to beat a rapid retreat, and that they are on no account to retire till all their comrades have joined them. Take the oars now, and let us push over."

He gave the words of command in a calm voice, which betrayed no sign of excitement or of confusion, but for all that Tyler could scarcely keep his limbs from trembling, while his lips twitched spasmodically and he was obliged to press them close together to keep them still; for the thought of those helpless captives stirred him strangely, the fear that their fate depended upon himself, and that upon his courage and discretion their rescue or continued imprisonment would result, kept his mind ill at ease and filled him with a feeling of nervousness to which he had up to this been a stranger.

"It must be done," he kept saying to himself as he was being wafted to the opposite shore, "and after all, why should I not be successful? for the part which has already been carried out so silently has been far larger and more full of difficulties, and yet see how smoothly it has worked. Yes, I will rescue those two helpless prisoners whatever happens."

With this resolution before him he became calmer and more at his ease, and prepared to set about the task in a manner which at once showed that he was full of courage and determination.

"Stand ready to embark rapidly," he said, as he crept to John Marshall and lay down beside him in the darkness. "If you hear me shout you will know that I require help, but otherwise you are not to come nearer to the stockade. Now I am going, but before I go I will remind you that this company will embark on the English vessel which the pirates

towed in. Men have already made a small prahu fast to her bows, and once the signal is given, and we are aboard, they will cut the cables and swing her round. After that she will be carried down by the stream."

"And it won't be long afore we get some of her canvas up," whispered the sailor. "Then if this here Dutchman and his men come after us, or any of them coves down the river attempt to stop us, why, we shall be able to tackle 'em in proper style. Now, sir, be careful, please, for you're our leader. Jest think of that, for these here Dyaks jest think a deal of yer and would be sorry if yer came to harm. There's me, too, you must remember"—and the honest fellow felt for Tyler's hand and gripped it firmly,—"what would I do to get on without yer? But you'll take the best of care, that I'm sure of, and you'll carry this through like the rest. If yer shout I'll be there in a twinkling, and if yer should happen to come up with that Dutch chap, jest think of how I downed him. Put yer fist in his face, and it'll silence him sooner than anything. Good-bye, and good luck!"

With another squeeze of the hand he released Tyler, the latter springing to his feet at once.

"Then all is settled," he said quietly. "If I shout, you come to help; if not, you remain here or embark at once. My orders are that the safety of the tribe is not on any account to be risked on my behalf."

A second later, when the sailor would have spoken to his leader, he was astonished to find that he had gone, and that his place was occupied by thinnest air. It gave him a start when he considered with what silence Tyler had gone, but a moment's reflection reminded him of the fact that his leader was dressed in native costume, and that he wore soft sandals upon his feet.

"All the better," murmured John Marshall, "for it'll make his chances brighter. I don't half like this game of his, and never did, though I see that he's right in making the attempt. But it's risky. It's the worst part of all this little adventure,

and I shall be thankful when I see him safe amongst us again. Ah! there he goes through the entrance, and it will be well for him to hurry, for a few minutes ago the stockade was out of sight, while now one can see it fairly easily, showing that morning is coming."

That this was the case became evident to all the watchers, for as they lay there on the bank their figures up to this had been invisible to one another, while now a keen searcher of the spot would have discovered them to a certainty had he been within close range of them. Indeed the night seemed to have gone quite suddenly, while a damp mist, which often precedes the morn in Borneo, lay over river and land, wrapping them in semi-obscurity.

"In ten minutes it will go, de sun will suck up de water from de air, and all will be bright," whispered Li Sung, who had thrown himself down beside John Marshall. "When massa comes, and we get aboard, de pirate see us sailing away, and dey get velly angry at de sight. He, he, he! De Dutchman him rave velly fine, and say many tings, but him not be able to follow, for he no havee ships."

The Chinaman again indulged in a half-audible chuckle, which caused the sailor to stretch out his hand and grip him by the shoulder.

"Silence," he said sternly, "and listen! Laugh and cackle as much as you wish when the master is with us again, but make a sound now and I'll—"

Exactly what the boatswain would have threatened to do to the faithful Chinaman it would be difficult to state, though his wrinkled forehead and the scowl upon his face might have indicated something terrible. However, a sound within the stockade suddenly arrested the altercation, and both lay there listening eagerly.

Creak! creak! Was it the door of the hut in which the prisoners were kept, or could some native have suddenly awakened before the dawn had come, as was so often their custom, and thrown wide the gate of his humble abode?

Both longed to clear up the question, but found it impossible, for from the position which they had taken up they were unable to command a view of the whole of the clearing within the stockade. Those on the prahus, however, could have enlightened them, for from the river the dull glare of the embers of the dying fires, the bamboo stockade, and every hut within were distinctly within view, while the dusky figure crawling across to that part where the captives had been taken was plainly discernible. With straining eyes each one of the Dyak tribe aboard the prahus watched the young leader whom they had come to look up to and admire. They saw him creep rapidly, but with every caution, through the entrance to the stockade and then across the clearing. As they stared at him through the misty haze, which was gradually and insensibly giving place to the light of day, they noted how he paused before the hut occupied by the rascally Dutch leader of the pirates, and each wondered with beating heart whether any sound had alarmed him.

Creak! creak! Ah! they, too, heard the noise of a wicket thrown open, and started at the sound. Then they stood there on the sloping decks listening for a shout, for a pistol-shot, for the roar of a hundred and more voices to tell them that the young Englishman had been discovered. But no, not another sound disturbed the silence of the awakening day, and the dusky figure was seen to be advancing again. Ah, he was at the hut where the prisoners were kept! Was he entering? Why did he pause at the door, and for what reason did he so hurriedly dart behind the dwelling?

Well might each member of the watching tribe of Dyaks ask the question, for the movements of their leader seemed unaccountable. But Tyler knew well what he was doing, and sounds which failed to spread so far as the men lying on the bank without the stockade, or those others waiting aboard the prahus, reached his ears distinctly.

"There is someone moving," he said to himself, as he

reached the hut which harboured the prisoners. "Who can it be? Perhaps some fellow turning in his couch."

Sitting up as high as possible, he listened eagerly, and then crept on a few paces. Then of a sudden he became aware of the fact that a door had been thrown open, and realizing that the sound came from the Dutchman's hut, he scrambled hastily behind the one close to which he was crouching.

"Hanns Schlott!" he exclaimed in tones of vexation. "His guilty mind will not allow him to sleep, and so he has come out to walk about the clearing. Ah, I have had my mind so fully occupied that I did not notice that it is already getting light, and he will be able to see me! Yes, even now I can observe his figure."

Staring through the mist and haze, which had so suddenly risen, Tyler watched the Dutchman emerge from his abode and stalk out into the clearing. Then, realizing with a start that to delay would be more dangerous than to proceed with the rescue, he waited for a few moments to allow a second hut to come between himself and the Dutchman, and then scrambled at his fastest pace to the door which would give access to the dwelling within which were the prisoners. A second later he had thrust it in, and was crawling through the opening.

"Who is that?" he heard someone demand in frightened tones, while there was the sound of a shriek commenced but suddenly arrested. "Oh, what is happening to us?"

"Hush! Do not make a sound for your lives," answered Tyler in low tones, crawling right into the hut and closing the door. "Do not be frightened, for I have come to help you and take you away."

"Then you are English? But I caught sight of a native, and that is what frightened me. Who are you?"

The question was asked in a whisper, while the young woman leant forward till she was close to Tyler, for his voice had reassured her.

"It is too long a story to tell you. but I have come to rescue

you and the little girl. Follow me at once, please, and do exactly as I say. Now, to the door!"

Waiting only to see that they had risen, and that the young woman had whispered reassuring words to the child, and had cautioned her against making a sound, Tyler went to the door and gently opened it.

"We shall have day with us in a few moments," he said, turning swiftly and with an involuntary exclamation of dismay. "Now, listen to me. We have captured the English ship from the pirates, and have also taken the prahus. My men are Dyaks, and they will be your friends. You must follow me at once, keeping well behind the huts. When we get to the opening through the stockade we will run. Do you understand? Then follow."

Glancing swiftly around, and failing to catch sight of Hanns Schlott, Tyler led the way into the clearing, and then, stealing along through the mist, he directed the prisoners amongst the huts so as to keep them out of sight. Very soon they came to a point where the dwellings ended, and where nothing but open ground stretched between the fugitives and the stockade. And here they came to an abrupt halt, while a feeling of dismay came over them; for there in the opening stood the burly figure of Hanns Schlott, his face turned to the river, while he stared into the mist as if something had occurred to awaken his suspicions.

"Strange!" he was murmuring; "is it the wine which I drank last night, or can it be the thought of that beggarly Englishman, by name Tyler Richardson, who threatened to follow me and see me hanged as a murderer? Tush! My eyes are playing me a trick, and I am out of sorts."

He stamped upon the ground in his vexation, and turned from the river for a moment. But again his eyes went back in that direction as if he were fascinated, while on this occasion he started forward, and, sheltering his eyes with his hand, stared into the cloud of watery vapour with an eagerness which showed that he was still ill at ease.

"Surely that is strange!" he said in hesitating tones. "Of course the mist is thickest over the water, but the prahus are outlined in it, though dimly, I admit. But how comes it that the ship which we captured is turned with stern this way, and her bows pointing to the sea? It is beyond my comprehension, for the tide does not make this way for three hours at least. And—am I really bewildered this morning and muddled by the wine?—half the fleet seems to have disappeared!"

He rubbed his eyes with his knuckles, and, tearing his hat from his head, thrust his fingers through his hair. Then once more he fixed his attention on the river, and stood there as if undecided still, and as though hesitating how to act. Meanwhile Tyler and his charges had watched him with feelings approaching dismay.

"We cannot possibly afford to wait more than three or four minutes," said the former, "and if he does not move then, we must rush past him. But I do not like to see him staring so hard at the river, for it seems to me that he suspects something, and I know that whatever he thinks at the moment he will soon realize what is happening once the sun clears the mist away. Get ready, miss, and if you see me start forward at a walk, be prepared to rush after me and go straight through the opening. I will see to that fellow."

The seconds seemed to be minutes, so slowly did they pass, and though Tyler only permitted some three of the latter to elapse before making a move, almost half an hour seemed to have been occupied in watching the burly Dutchman. Indeed, now that he had come so close to success in the undertaking which he had set himself, the fear that, after all, he would be beaten, that Hanns Schlott would cut off his retreat and retain his prisoners, filled Tyler's mind with apprehension and anxiety, and those few minutes seemed almost a lifetime. And all the while the Dutchman stood as if rooted to the spot, still unable to make up his feeble mind as to what was happening, and hesitating to awake his followers at this early hour

and bring them rushing forth on a fool's errand, which would cause them to grumble and laugh at their leader.

Suddenly, as he turned to the collection of huts behind him, his eye fell upon the figure of a swarthy Dyak, with sandalled feet, who was advancing towards him, and taking him for one of his own men he called eagerly to him.

"Come here and tell me what you see," he said in commanding tones. "My sight is not very certain in these early morning mists, and often plays me false. Say, are the prahus still at their moorings, and why is it that the vessel which we captured has her head turned to the sea?"

He was in the act of turning once more to the river, to direct the gaze of the native who had advanced towards him, when another doubt, something unusual about the man, seemed to strike him, and he swung round, to face Tyler with a start of surprise.

"Sandals!" he gasped. "Sopping waist-cloth, and—and colour which runs in streaks down the body and leaves white beneath!"

Like a flash he recognized who this native must be, and stood there staring at him as though the discovery stifled him, as though the boldness of the Englishman took his breath away. Then, quick as lightning, a thought, a horrible dread, came over him.

"Had the Englishman come to the stockade with others of his country? Was that the reason of the disappearance of some of the prahus? And had this man, this youth whom he had openly called a cub, but whom in his heart he feared not a little, and whose persistence had amazed him, had this Tyler Richardson tracked him to this spot, and by some uncanny means induced him, the leader of this gang of pirates, to emerge from his hut at that early hour in the morning and walk alone, like a helpless fly, into the web which had been woven to catch him?"

The thought sent the blood surging to his face, only to recede in an instant and leave him deadly pale. He gasped,

threw back his head to take in a much-needed breath, and would have set the air ringing with a shriek of dismay had not Tyler suddenly stopped him. Instantly realizing that he had been recognized, and that his disguise was discovered, he threw himself upon the Dutchman like a hound, and, mindful of the advice which John Marshall had given him just before they had parted, dealt Hanns Schlott a terrific blow between the eyes.

"For you!" he shouted, throwing silence and caution to the winds in his excitement as he delivered the blow. "That to show you that a Dutchman cannot stop an Englishman!"

Had he been struck by a hammer Hanns Schlott could not have been more staggered, or thrown off his balance. Indeed, the suddenness and the unexpected nature of the attack, and the force with which the fist crashed upon his face, had combined to send him to the ground, and but for the fact that the edge of the stockade happened to be close at hand he would have gone upon his back in the clearing, just as he had on a former occasion fallen crash to the floor of the schooner's cabin before the fist of John Marshall. Instead, however, his bulky figure was driven heavily against the bamboos, and, recoiling from them with the force of the impact, he was thrown once more in the direction of his opponent. Nor did Tyler hesitate how to act. Drawing back a pace he leapt again at the leader of the pirates, sending both his fists beneath his chin. Ah! That was sufficient to stop Hanns Schlott, in spite of his great weight. As the doubled fingers struck him his chin shot into the air and his head was doubled back. Then, throwing his arms helplessly before him, he fell like a log, his back coming into violent contact with the ground.

"Quickly!" called Tyler, turning to beckon to the two who followed him. "Now give me a hand and together we will run to the boats."

Grasping the child by her disengaged hand he, together with the young woman whom he had rescued, ran at their fastest pace down to the river, bearing their charge between

them. A second later John Marshall and his men confronted the fugitives and hastened them to the boats.

"Jest a proper whop!" cried the former in tones of delight, his enthusiasm urging him to give his congratulations without delay. "I tell yer I saw it all, for I had taken good care to creep to a spot where I had the entrance under view, and I reckon I could hear the fist strike him. But he's only downed for a minute. He's silly just now, but he'll be shouting afore we are well on the river, and then there will be some fun. This way, my dear. Give the child to me, and you'll see that John Marshall can take care of her."

Lifting the child in his arms he went to one of the sampans and embarked, the young woman following. As for Tyler, he too ran down to the water's edge, and stood there while his men scrambled aboard their boats.

"All there?" he demanded quietly. "Then push off at once and make for the English ship. Li Sung, you can shout to the others to cut away from their moorings and make for the sea."

Leaping into one of the sampans he took his place in the bows and stood there eagerly watching the scene before him. Nor had he any difficulty in observing each one of the prahus which the tribe commanded, for, as is so often the case in the East, the sun had risen with startling suddenness, and, streaming along the open space left by the river, had swept the mist away as if with a broom. And there, as if with the movement of a magician's wand, a brilliant day had suddenly displaced the gloom, showing the broad surface of the Sarebus flashing in the morning rays, and stirred here and there by the keels of the prahus, while on either side and behind was a net-work of green, enormous trees standing in serried lines and huddled together till it scarcely seemed to need the trailing creepers, the ferns, and the festoons of dazzling blooms to fill up the intervals. And lower down, with the rising sun as a setting to them, were a score of piratical vessels, some with masts alone to be seen, while others floated upon the

river in ungainly positions, careening this way and that, some with bows thrust high into the air, and others with their decks on the point of being submerged.

"The remainder of Hanns Schlott's fleet," said Tyler with just the trace of a smile wreathing his lips. "He will be at a loss without them. But listen to the noise he is making. He is bellowing as if he had been hurt."

"And he will shout so loud and will rush by the paths along the river so that de men below hear," chimed in Li Sung, who stood by his master's side. "You see; China boy him tellee you dat de Dutchman havee a velly big try to turn de table. He shout and him halloo, and as me say, he send de men along de river bank. But who cares? Li him quite happy. He hab big ship velly soon, and him sail to meet him wife and family."

"If those below will let you," laughed Tyler, feeling now as though a load of anxious care had been lifted from his mind. "But, as you say, Li, it does not matter very much, for the tribe is now a hundred times better off than an hour ago, for we have ships, and we have weapons, and there is liberty and freedom before us. But here is the ship. Up we go!"

Thanks to the careful drilling which the Dyaks had received there was no confusion at this, almost the last stage of their adventurous journey. Obedient to the orders of their leader, those who had been told off to look to the English schooner had warped her round till her head pointed downstream, and had then hung on to her, prepared at any moment to tow her towards the bend, while two of their comrades, placed in a sampan at the stern, severed the cables with their swords. Waiting, therefore, for a shout from Tyler, they pulled at their sweeps, and hardly had the rescued prisoners and their escort scrambled aboard than the schooner was under weigh.

"We will keep in rear," said Tyler, calling John Marshall to his side. "Take the tiller, my lad, and keep her in the

centre of the stream. I will go with Li Sung, and will arrange to have a sail or two bent. There will be no difficulty either, for many are hanging in their places half-furled."

"And what wind there is is down-stream," added the boatswain. "Give the sheets a pull to bring 'em tight, and then get the darkies to shy a bucket or two of water over the sails. It'll make 'em draw, and send us along bowling."

"I'll see what can be done about guns, too," went on Tyler, "for I fancy that we shall have to fight for it later on. But it will be a small affair compared with what we have had already, and somehow I don't seem to mind much."

"And I don't think no more of the idea than that," burst in the sailor, snapping his fingers. "I'm jest light-hearted, I am, and I keeps on a-roaring at the Dutchman. Lor', didn't he catch it!"

The honest fellow went to the tiller with a broad grin upon his features, looking a peculiar object indeed as he stood there in his strange garb of a Dyak. As for Tyler, it was a wonder that he did not see the ridiculous side of his appearance also, for the swim across the river had not improved his disguise by any means. In fact the merest glance was sufficient to show that he was no native, for long white streaks extended from his neck to his feet, while his face presented a mottled appearance. Then, owing to his swim across the river, and to the subsequent grovelling in mud and in the dust within the stockade, he had obtained a coating which matched but badly with the stain of the betel-nut, while his waist-cloth and turban were much discoloured. But he had no time for the subject, and indeed, when he looked toward the stern to see the boatswain in similar attire, he found nothing wrong, nothing out of the ordinary, and it seemed only what was to be expected to have a big raw-boned native there, watching the rigging with nautical eye, and standing at his tiller in a business-like manner which showed that he was a sailor born and bred.

"The sails first and the guns afterwards," said Tyler, run-

ning forward with Li Sung. "Get to work, like a good fellow, and take charge of one gang. I will do what I can with the other."

Thanks to the fact that the vessel had been sailed into the river, and that those who had captured her had not taken the trouble to strip her of her canvas, but had merely furled the sheets to the yards, the new owners of the schooner had little difficulty in setting a large amount of sail, so much so that ere long those on board the prahu were being overhauled, and seeing that their sweeps were no longer needed, prepared to come aboard.

"Make her fast to the stern and we will drop a ladder for you," shouted Tyler, Li Sung interpreting the order. "She may be useful to us later on, or I would have her scuttled. Now, how are the others doing?"

He turned his face down the river, and watched the other prahus which bore the tribe of Dyaks who had journeyed with him so far.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "My followers evidently understand all about vessels of that description, and they have them now fairly under weigh. Then the stream is helping them along, and as they are smaller and more easily manœuvred than this schooner, they should be able to keep well ahead. But we will see to that, and should any be lagging we will keep them company, for it would never do to leave them behind. How are they behaving at the pirate's stronghold?"

"Dey velly angry," said Li Sung with twinkling eyes, shaking his head at Tyler. "Dey not know velly fine what have happened, but dey see de prahus going, and dey watch dose which have not sunk. Ah! dis morning am a velly bad one for dem."

"But there will be a worse to follow, Li. I hope to come this way again later on, and drive them out altogether. But for the time being we have enough to do without talking of that. I see that a number of the pirates have plunged into

the jungle, and are no doubt bound for their friends lower down. When can we expect to come across another stockade?"

"Plenty quick, massa. De pirates havee anoder place a mile below, on de right of de bank, and before velly long we be dere. Dey be ready for us too, me tink, and den de guns fire and de swords flash."

"We shall see to that," said Tyler calmly, "and as there seems to be no doubt that we shall have to encounter these fellows I will see what can be done in the way of defence. But let us get our men aboard, and then set more sails."

Turning abruptly to the stern again, he ran there with the Chinaman and threw a rope-ladder overboard, up which the dusky Dyaks ascended with the agility of monkeys. Then he took them along the deck with him and set them to work at the rigging. Fortunately there was little difficulty about the matter, and very soon the schooner was showing quite a large amount of canvas, which, now that it was drenched with water, as John Marshall had advised, caught the wind and sent the ship surging towards the sea. And meanwhile the other prahus had made good way, and, keeping to the centre of the river, which broadened rapidly now that they had passed out of sight of Paddi, went sweeping along in front of the English vessel which bore their leader. That the Dyaks were full of excitement and of courage there was no doubt, for they crowded to the bulwarks of their several prahus and flung shouts of defiance at the pirates who raced along beside them. Indeed, never before had they been in the position of being able to taunt these fierce enemies, and now that the opportunity had come, and they realized to the full that for the very first time it was they who were masters of the situation, while those who had so often attacked them and caused them untold suffering were helpless and beaten, they taunted them till the pirates raged with anger, and waved swords, blow-pipes, and spears at them as if bidding them wait but a little time and then join in combat with those who

in former days had trembled at the approach of one even of these fierce warriors of the sea.

As for the pirates, they were utterly beaten and baffled, and helpless to follow those who had made such an audacious attack upon them, by means of the river, for not a sampan had been left to them, while every prahu that they had possessed was now sailing for the sea or was beneath the water. They raced down the stream by forest paths, sometimes being within full view of Tyler and his men, and at others buried in the jungle which completely hid them from sight. But their intention was obvious, for as they ran they fired their flint muskets and shouted at the top of their voices, with the one object of warning their comrades below.

"The shots will have been heard long ago," said Tyler quietly, as he gazed with satisfaction at the rigging, "and when we come to this other stronghold we shall have to face more enemies. Let us see at once to the guns."

With Li Sung in close attendance he went to the cabin, and then thoroughly searched the ship, returning before very long with an abundance of ammunition and small-arms, while the Chinaman staggered beneath the weight of shot for a swivel-gun which was secured to the deck amidships.

"Can the Dyaks be trusted to fire these weapons?" asked Tyler, indicating the flint-locks. "It would never do to give them into their hands if they were unaccustomed to firearms, for otherwise they would be shooting one another."

"Massa need havee no fear. De Dyaks plenty knowee de gun, but dey too poor to buy, and de powder and de shot too dear for dem to havee when at home," replied Li Sung with elevated eyebrows. "But dey knowee allee about dese tings. Oh yes, massa, dey fire de gun plenty time before, and you see, Li soon showee dem allee about dese."

With a knowing wag of his head the Chinaman called the Dyaks about him and began to distribute the firearms amongst them, cautioning them at the same time to be careful in their use of them, for fear of accidents.

"And let them know that they are not to open fire until I have given the word," interposed Tyler in the middle of Li's explanations. "A scattered volley will be useless to us, and I have been told that natives always waste ammunition by firing when still long out of range of the enemy. We must endeavour to cool their excitement, and to make them wait till the prahus are close upon us. But what is that down lower? Surely I see a stockade of some sort there?"

"Dat de oder place," responded Li Sung quickly, shading his eyes from the glare of the sun for the space of a minute ere he gave the reply. "Dat Pakoo, massa, and dere am de pirates. Li see dem wid de boom, and dey trying to close de river."

At once all eyes were turned down the stream, where, some hundreds of yards away, a number of prahus and sampans of large size could be seen floating on the water. A careful inspection soon showed Tyler that the Chinaman had made no mistake, for as he looked he distinctly saw four of the largest sampans linked together in line, while their crews tugged at the sweeps which the craft carried instead of the oars used on smaller boats of a similar description. Behind the boats a long curling cable of large dimensions was being towed, and very soon it became clear to all aboard the escaping prahus that this was a boom which the pirates were endeavouring to make fast to the opposite shore and so bar the progress of the fugitives.

"We will soon make an end of that for them," said Tyler quietly, "for I should think that the boom would hardly hold a couple of the prahus, and much less the fleet which we have captured. But this schooner will rip through the chains and logs as if the boom were composed of string, and will open the passage to our comrades. Keep her for the very centre," he shouted, turning his head towards the boatswain, "and see if you cannot overtake our friends."

Coming down-stream with a brisk breeze and a swift current to aid them, Tyler and his friends approached the boom,

which had by now been firmly secured, at a rapid pace, and very soon two of the prahus, which were somewhat in advance of their consorts, reached the obstruction, and were brought to a stand-still, for the boom was unusually powerful. A third struck against it with the same result, and it began to look as though, after all, escape for the tribe and their young leader would not be so easy. Indeed, to the pirates, who had streamed from their stronghold at the warning shouts of their comrades of Paddi, victory already appeared to be on their side, and they rent the air with hoarse shouts of delight. Crowded upon their prahus, which they had manned in all haste, they pulled into the river to the lower side of the boom, and there hung on their oars while they watched the enemy coming down upon the stream. As a fourth and a fifth vessel lodged upon the boom their excitement and delight became even greater, and, unable to contain themselves any longer, and being led by the largest of their prahus, they pulled at the boom, and prepared to come to close quarters with the men who had dared to make such an attack upon their friends. Leaping into sampans, which each of the prahus towed in her wake, some rowed at once for the boom, and gliding over it, or lifting their boat across the logs and chains, embarked again and came towards their victims at a furious pace. Others, discarding the aid of a boat, leapt into the water and swam to the boom, upon which they climbed. Then, balancing upon it with as much ease as an average European does on a wide pavement, they came splashing along, brandishing their weapons and shouting fiercely to terrify those whom they were about to attack.

"For the centre!" shouted Tyler, turning again to John Marshall. "Cut through the boom, and then throw her up into the wind till we see that all our friends are through. If we fail to break it, I will lead a party with axes."

Knowing that he could have full confidence in the boatswain, he left him to carry out the order unaided, and at once ran in search of something with which to cut the boom should

the weight of the schooner prove insufficient. But there was really no need for him to have fears on the matter, for, thanks to the powerful stream and to the pull of her canvas, the English vessel which he and his men had appropriated rushed at the obstruction at such a pace that it was clear that nothing could stop her. Steered by the deft hand of the sailor, she headed for the very centre, the weakest spot, and, striking it with all her force, severed it as if it had been paper. Then, plunging on in her course, she bore down upon the large prahu which had led the attack upon those who had been arrested by the boom, and ere the latter could be moved aside by means of her sweeps the schooner was upon her. Ah! The crash of rending wood-work filled the air, while shrieks and shouts of alarm were heard on every side. But the schooner never faltered, indeed her frame never even seemed to feel the jar, but, plunging on, she rolled the prahu upon her beam-ends, and then drove clean over her, sending her straight to the bottom. As for those of her crew who had leapt upon the boom, or had taken to the sampans, they were left upon the surface of the river gazing at the retreating fleet in consternation, as yet unable to realize that those who a minute before seemed at their mercy had so suddenly made good their escape, and had robbed them of one of their finest prahus. With fear in their hearts they turned to their stockade again, and disappeared within, feeling that to attempt pursuit of such an enemy would end only in further suffering.

"And now for Sarawak!" shouted Tyler, as the fleet of prahus sailed clear of the boom, and headed for the sea once more. "Our troubles are almost over, and within a day we should be safely amongst friends. Hurrah for Sarawak!"

CHAPTER XIII

The Rajah of Sarawak

STANDING down-stream under a cloud of canvas the fleet of prahus, with the English schooner escorting, made an imposing sight, and Tyler could not but feel proud as he looked on at the scene; for it was wonderful to think that he and the humble Dyaks should have met with such success, and that the termination of their journey should have found them better off by far than they were at the commencement.

"Why, these prahus alone will be enough to set the tribe up once we have arrived," mused Tyler, "and no doubt we shall be able to sell them with ease. Then, again, the fact that the Sarebus pirates have met with a reverse at our hands will ensure a welcome for the Dyaks. But I must not run too far ahead, for we are not yet out of the river. Tell me," he went on, calling the Chinaman to him, "are there any others to be feared? This river seems to be infested with pirates, and it will not surprise me to hear that there are others."

"Den you will see dat dat is so, massa. De Rembas men live some miles below, and dey velly fierce, velly bad. But dey not always friends wid de men of Paddi and de oders whom we havee beaten. Perhaps dey not interfere, and if dey do, well, massa, sail de schooner down upon dem and dey sink, dey goee to de bottom."

The news that more enemies might yet have to be encountered scarcely caused our hero any uneasiness, for he had come to understand that the prahus manned by the pirates

were no match for an English ship, unless, indeed, the latter were becalmed, or in some way unable to offer resistance. But for all that he did not allow the subject to escape him, and having, by dint of shouts and signals, induced his followers to draw close together, and lay-to for a time, he sent a message to each one of the prahus that they were to keep behind the schooner, and that on no account were the men to show their arms, or to wave to the enemy. Then, turning the schooner's bows once more towards the sea, he led the way a ship's length ahead of the fleet, and ere long arrived off the tributary upon which the Rembas pirates had their lair. But there was no sign of the latter, and, indeed, not a boat crossed the water till the coast was at hand and they were making through the wide mouth of the river.

"A fleet making in," said John Marshall in Tyler's ear, suddenly pointing to one edge of the wide bay into which the Sarebus poured. "They will pass close to us as we run into the sea, and from the looks of them they are pirates."

"And we have much the same appearance," said Tyler calmly. "We will keep on without an attempt to alter our course, and perhaps they will take us for their friends. One moment and I will get rid of this colour from my face, and will hunt out a coat. Then I can take the helm and pretend to be the Dutchman."

Running below he quickly unearthed a coat from one of the cabins, and, having obtained a bucket and a piece of soap, immersed his face in water. Five minutes later he returned to the deck with a less dusky complexion, and with the coat about his shoulders.

"Now for the helm," he said, noticing that the fleet was now close at hand, and that the pirates would pass within hailing distance. "It seems to me that they will not even question us, for they will know that the men of Paddi have recently captured an English schooner, and will think nothing of the fact that the latter is leading the prahus to sea. But I do hope that our fellows will not allow their excitement

to get the better of them, and shout and jeer at these strangers."

By now the gathering of prahus, which had been sighted entering the mouth of the river Sarebus, was close at hand, steering a course which would take it close beside the fleet under Tyler's command. But it was evident that the leader, whatever his feelings with regard to the men of Paddi, had no suspicions of the new-comers, for he had posted himself in the bows of his own particular command, and as he swept past the schooner he leapt upon the rail and shouted a greeting, to which Tyler responded by waving his arm. Then all the dusky pirates from Rembas, a gang as celebrated in those seas for their bloodthirstiness and acts of violence as were the men of Paddi, lined the bulwarks and sent their cheers across the narrow space which intervened as the two fleets sailed by one another. Quick to grasp the fact that they were undiscovered, the Dyaks replied with loud cries and much waving of the arms, and then, ere there was time for any more, or for the exchange of words, the prahus had separated and were swiftly running away from one another.

"And now there is nothing but the open sea and a grand passage between us and friends," exclaimed Tyler, with every sign of satisfaction, "and, that being the case, I am reminded that we have eaten nothing for many hours. Li Sung, just get below and see what is to be found. We will divide the provisions, and send their share to the men and women on the other prahus. And now I can devote a little time to the captives whom we rescued."

Six hours later, having coasted along within easy distance of the line of surf which beat without cessation upon the land of Borneo, the fleet bore up to the left, and entered the river which led to the town of Sarawak, and ere very long had sighted the collection of buildings which went by that name.

"And there's two ships of some sort," cried John Marshall as he stood by his leader's side, suddenly pointing to a creek close beside the houses. "They're English too, and what's

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more, they're sending their boats away. It looks as though they were coming in this direction."

"That is certainly the case," replied Tyler, at once catching sight of the vessels to which the sailor had alluded, and noticing that each had lowered three boats, which were being rowed towards the incoming fleet. "I suppose that they are coming to give us a welcome, or perhaps to see who we are."

"What do we look like, do yer think, sir?" cried the boatswain gruffly. "Why, back there at the mouth of the Sarebus river you said that we were jest like pirates, and if that hadn't been the case, them men of Rembas would soon have been at our throats. Well, don't yer see? These fellers here, under the Englishman I suppose, take us for what we look to be, and if we're not partic'lar careful they'll be firing into us."

That this was a possibility all very quickly saw, for as the fleet of prahus and the six open boats approached one another the latter were seen to be manned by men in naval dress, while in the bows of each a swivel-gun was carried. Indeed, as if to show the strangers that their arrival at Sarawak would be contested, a spout of flame and smoke shot out from one of the guns at that moment, and a ball came hurtling across the forefoot of the schooner. A second followed swiftly, ricochetting across the water, and then hulling the vessel, striking with a thud which could be heard far away.

"And now come the bullets," said Tyler with a smile, as the patter of musketry broke the silence, and the water was splashed beside the schooner. "But the mistake has gone far enough, and we must let them see their error. Stand aside, John, and just tell Li Sung to warn the others to get under cover. I will go forward and shout to them."

Running into the bows, he sprang upon the rail there, and with one hand holding the rigging so as to retain his position, waved a piece of sail-cloth to the men who were approaching.

"Friends!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Don't fire any more, or you will be killing those who are coming here to ask for your protection."

His words carried easily across the water, and almost at once an officer was seen to rise to his feet.

"Cease fire!" they heard him shout. "Now, surround that schooner, as she seems to be the leader, and train your guns upon her. You can lie off so as to be out of range of their spears, but do not be so far away as to make a rush impossible. I will go closer in, and see who it is that called to us."

Careless of the fact that he might have been running into a trap, the officer gave an order for the boat to be pulled closer in, and then stood in the bows awaiting the moment when he would be able to go aboard the stranger. As for Tyler, with a shout to attract John Marshall's attention, and a wave of his arm, he had caused the latter to throw the schooner into the wind, a movement which was at once imitated by those in command of the other vessels. Then in his quaint costume, consisting of an old coat which had been made for a man of a smaller size than himself, and with the remains of his old disguise about him, he stood at the top of a rope-ladder which was lowered over the side.

"Eh! what's this?" demanded the officer as he scrambled over the rail. "And who are you who sail into the river at the head of a fleet which we could not help but take for pirates? Why, you're a youngster, surely, and an Englishman!"

"Tyler Richardson by name," responded our hero, stepping forward with his hand held to his forehead in salute. "Gazetted to the *Dido*, sir, and pursued by pirates on my way to join my ship."

"And you understand how to salute an officer of superior rank," cried the one who had boarded the schooner, in astonished tones. "Tyler Richardson! Why, that is the name of the young fellow who was to come to us, the lad who rescued two naval officers from the hold of a ship which lay in Southampton."

"I am the one of whom you speak," said Tyler modestly. "As I have said, I came out to Singapore, and hearing that

the *Dido* had left the China seas, I obtained permission to accompany a gentleman who was coming to Borneo to explore certain parts of the island. A Dutchman, who had shipped with us as interpreter, and who turned out to be one of two leaders of the pirates of Sarebus, murdered my friend, and then helped his followers to capture our ship. Our boatswain, John Marshall, who stands beside you, actually saw the ruffian fire the shot which killed Mr. Beverley. Then he came to my aid, and together we were able to regain possession of the schooner by means of a trick."

"And this is the same vessel, I presume?" interrupted the officer, whose face showed his amazement.

"No, sir, this is another," replied Tyler quietly. "This fellow of whom I speak, the Dutchman—"

"I beg your pardon, but what is his name, and where did he and his scoundrels hail from?" suddenly asked the officer, interrupting for the second time.

"He commanded the men of Sarebus, and was helped by a countryman of the name of Christian van Sonerell."

"Then we know of them, and a precious couple they are too! But we shall catch them some day, and then they will have much to answer for. But please go on with your tale, Mr. Richardson, and let me say at once, before we go any further, that I give you a hearty welcome to Sarawak and the *Dido*. Shake hands."

He grasped Tyler warmly by the fingers, and then turned to greet John Marshall in the same manner.

"Very glad to welcome you," he added. "You will be an addition to our company, and will find many friends. Now for these Dutchmen, please, and for news of their whereabouts."

"The murderer, Hans Schlott, is within his stronghold at Paddi, where we left him this morning," said Tyler, "and the other—"

"Paddi! You left him there! But, excuse me, I will not interrupt again."

The officer managed to repress his astonishment, and stood there staring at our hero as he detailed what had happened to himself and to John Marshall.

"And so you and the boatswain managed to get clear away from this rascal, and have arrived here with a whole tribe of Dyaks," he said at last, when Tyler had ended. "Well, I can scarcely credit the story at present, though please do not imagine for a moment that I doubt your word. But you must understand that the whole thing is so out of the common, the adventure so strange and perplexing, that I am unable to grasp its details at present. How you and this lad here managed to beat the Dutchman so often is beyond me, and your audacity in making for Paddi takes my breath away. Why, sir, I can tell you that the Rajah of Sarawak hesitates to attack the stronghold for fear of being beaten back, and also because he needs a guide. But we shall alter that now, or I am much mistaken; for if we went for no other purpose we should be bound to hunt out this rascal who murdered your friend Mr. Beverley. But we have been speaking for long, and my men will be firing into you if we are not careful, imagining that you have laid your hands on me. One moment and I will explain matters to them."

Leaving Tyler and the boatswain for a few moments, he went to the rail and called to those who manned the boats to come closer to the schooner. Then in a few hurried words he explained that those who had so suddenly appeared opposite Sarawak were friends, and were not pirates, as had at first appeared to be the case.

"And now, Mr. Richardson, I think that you should report your arrival first to Captain Keppel and then to the Rajah of Sarawak, Mr. Brooke, of whom you have heard," he continued, approaching Tyler with a friendly smile. "If you will leave the tribe to me I will see that they are housed and fed, while my men will board the prahus and take them to their moorings. As for your comrade, he had better go with you, and afterwards perhaps some post will be found for him, for we

must remember that he does not belong to the royal navy, but to the merchant service."

"Then we had better look out some clothes, sir," said Tyler contrasting his own appearance with that of the smart officer who had accosted him. "Will you allow us to go below before we report ourselves? Then we shall be able to make ourselves respectable."

"By all means, Mr. Richardson," was the hearty answer, "and while you are below I will undertake to have the little girl and her nurse taken ashore. It was a gallant act to rescue them, and you will have the thanks of your captain for it. But there, I see that you do not like to have overmuch praise, so go below. I shall be here when you return, so as to give you an introduction."

Saluting him again, Tyler turned about, and, accompanied by John Marshall, slipped down to the cabin of the schooner. And here, thanks to the fact that the pirates had put off stripping their prize till the morning after their arrival at Paddi, the two were able to discover an abundance of clothing, and soon made their appearance on deck dressed in thin suits of blue.

"An excellent change," said the officer with a smile, as they went up to him. "It was no wonder that I took you for dangerous individuals when you arrived, for your disguises made you look more than fierce. But now you are like the rest of us, and are fully prepared for an interview with those who lead us. You can hop into the boat at once and come with me, and by the way, Mr. Richardson, my name is Horton, Lieutenant Wilmot Horton of the *Dido*."

Responding promptly to the invitation to enter the boat which awaited them, Tyler and the companion who had stood beside him through their long and adventurous journey clambered down the rope-ladder which dangled over the side, and having been instantly followed by the lieutenant, were soon on their way to the largest of the two vessels moored off the town of Sarawak.

"Follow me," said the officer, taking Tyler by the sleeve as they reached the deck. "You can go forward till we send for you, my lad," he added, turning to John Marshall. "Now, Mr. Richardson, our captain is on the poop, and we will go to him. Please remember to touch your hat as you mount the companion ladder, and again as you stand before him."

Hearty indeed was the welcome which was given to our hero when it was known who he was. From the commander of the *Dido* downwards all vied with one another in showing him how glad they were to see him.

"Of course I know that you are somewhat over the ordinary age," said Captain Keppel, as he chatted with him in his cabin; "but then you have won a commission by bravery, and that is sufficient to recommend you and to make the Lords of the Admiralty overlook your years. Not that you are so very old, my lad," he added with a smile. "Then you have come to us with a tale which will procure much commendation, for you have actually been in the lair which these pirates inhabit, and will be able to guide us there and tell us of their doings.

"But I must not keep you longer, for it is necessary that you should go to Mr. Brooke, who is now the Rajah of the province of Sarawak, and tell him what has occurred. You will oblige me by taking this young officer ashore, Mr. Horton, and introducing him to the rajah. Send the man who accompanied him to me, so that I may listen to the story and hear every detail."

Both at once turned about, touching their caps as they did so, and repeating the action as they descended from the poop. Then they re-entered the boat which lay alongside, and were pulled to the landing-stage which had been erected close to the rajah's residence.

"Not at home just now," said the lieutenant, after he had made enquiries of a Dyak lad who stood at the door. "Then we will wait, and as the rajah keeps open house, and gives the officers an invitation to enter whether he is here or not, we will go in and shelter from the heat. Follow me, and I

will show you where you can be comfortable. By the way, my lad, I suppose you know all about Mr. Brooke and his doings?"

"Very little, I am afraid," answered Tyler. "Of course Mr. Beverley told me that he was here, and that he had come to better the condition of the natives. But I did not know more than that, and do not now."

"Then I will spin you a yarn about this man, who is a wonder in many respects, and who has gained the esteem and affection of every one of us, from our commander downwards. Let me see; yes, I will commence by telling you that one time he belonged to our sister service, the army, and saw a considerable amount of fighting in India and Burmah, distinguishing himself in the latter country, where he led the assault upon a stockade, and was shot through the chest. That wound sent him home, and it is by the merest good luck, and thanks also to the fact that he had an excellent constitution, that our friend lived to come to Sarawak; for he was badly hurt, and hovered between life and death for many a month. However, recover he did at last, when he set about finding a task which would occupy all his thoughts and all his energy, and which would at the same time help to lighten the condition of those of his fellow-beings who were worse off than himself. And that brings me to a point which I have not mentioned. This wounded soldier was a thinker, and is, too, at this moment. He did not waste his time in frivolity, in games and pastimes, as do so many in both services. But he devoted much of his life to work, and to investigating the condition of men in various parts of the world. Thanks to that fact, and also to the opportunity which a trading venture had given him, he became aware of the misery existing in this island of Borneo, and from that moment he was bent upon relieving the condition of the people. Now you will admit that there are few who would have set about such a matter, for when you come to consider the facts you will see that Borneo is, in the first place, an island of large extent, while this portion, called Borneo Proper, is perhaps as large as England herself. Then,

again, the rajah knew well that pirates abounded, and that if he escaped attack from them he was likely at any moment to have the Dyaks seeking for his life, for some of the tribes are very ferocious. Still, whatever their nature, there was no doubt that life was but a misery to the majority of the people, that they were constantly robbed, killed, or hurried into slavery by the pirates, and that that condition of affairs had existed for untold years. To all of this Mr. Brooke determined to put a stop.

"You will ask very naturally: 'How did he set about the matter?' and I will at once admit that, to anyone faced with the same question and the same difficulty, an answer would be hard to find. How could one man, without the aid of his Government, without soldiers or sailors to help him, hope to set foot in the island, and control the deeds of thousands of human beings, men who knew nothing of his aims and objects, and cared less? Why, even those for whose relief he aimed were too absorbed in their misery, too used to their lives, to think that change was possible, and when he first came, some of them were amongst his bitterest enemies, for they could not understand that one man, and he a foreigner, could take such interest in a race of natives who were strangers to him.

"Thus you will see from what I have said that from the very first the prospect of success was not too bright, while the method by which reform could be brought about was so obscure and difficult to arrive at that a man endowed with similar courage and persistence might well have given the task up in despair, feeling that to make a commencement on the work was well-nigh impossible. Not so our friend the Rajah of Sarawak. His heart was set upon the undertaking, and he allowed nothing to stand in his way. When I tell you that he had absolutely nothing to gain, that his mission was not one for the purpose of profit-making, and that he ran the risk of losing anything that he already possessed, I think that you too will be filled with admiration.

"As an example of his dogged perseverance, he did not

rush at this enterprise with the impetuosity of a young man, only to give up the idea at the first rebuff, or when real difficulties commenced to stare him in the face. But he set himself, first of all, to train a crew of men upon whom he could rely, and for that purpose he bought, out of his private fortune, a schooner, the *Royalist*, which lies alongside the *Dido* at this moment. For three years he cruised in her, for the most part in the Mediterranean, and during the whole of that time he was busily engaged in hunting up records of the island of Borneo and the surroundings. At length, feeling that his preparations were completed, he sailed from Devonport on December 16th, 1838, having a crew of twenty men, and a supply of arms aboard, including six six-pounder guns. On arrival at Singapore he shipped a few Malay hands to help with the wooding and watering of the ship, and then shaped a course for Sarawak.

"Now Marudu, which is in the north of the island, had been the part for which he had intended to sail when leaving England, thinking that that port would be the best at which to commence his labours. But news gathered in Singapore caused him to change his mind, and therefore he came to Sarawak, anchoring at the very spot where the two vessels are now moored. Imagine his pleasure when, on landing, he found himself received with every honour by Rajah Muda Hassim, uncle of the Sultan of Borneo. It was indeed a pleasant surprise, for our friend had expected anything but a welcome; and had he carried out his first idea, and sailed for Marudu, there is little doubt that a very different reception would have awaited him, for that district was ruled over by a notorious chief who favoured piracy, and in consequence the bay was the rendezvous for all the robbers and ruffians in and about the island.

"This Muda Hassim, however, was a very different class of individual, for he had some education, and, in place of being fierce and unscrupulous, he was gentle in manner, while, for a Malay, he was possessed of honest intentions.

"And now to tell you how Mr. Brooke commenced this work of his, to describe how the first seeds were sown, the thin end of the wedge introduced, and the old miserable order, with its cruelties and oppression, slowly banished. Do not think that change was brought about from the very first, and that, because a pleasant welcome had greeted him, his influence was to have weight with the natives simply on account of the fact that he was an Englishman, and because men of that race were thought much of in that part of Borneo. The rajah would have done nothing, would have met with failure, had it not been for the fact that this native, Muda Hassim, was in difficulties and in need of help, and that by coming to his aid our friend first of all made him his debtor for life, while at the same time he showed the natives what a man he was; that his word was reliable, and that he could fight as well as he could talk. Yes, that was the secret of his success. From the very first he had enemies, and there is no doubt that his life was often in danger; but the rajah never thought of his position seriously, but boldly went amongst the natives. Then, too, he showed an ever-ready disposition to protect those who lived beneath the sway of this Muda Hassim, and on one occasion, when a fleet of pirates arrived in the river, with the intention of sailing farther up and raiding the Dyaks in the interior, this commander of the *Royalist* manned his guns and let the marauders see that they would have to fight an action before they could pass. For that he gained the gratitude of many who had never set eyes upon him, but who at that time knew him vaguely as the Englishman.

"Very soon, however, his name and his appearance were known everywhere, for Muda Hassim was, as I have already said, in great difficulties. It seems that a rebellion had broken out in the district of Sarawak, owing to the oppression of a chief of the name of Makota, and that for many months matters had been at a stand-still. The rebels were entrenched in stockades, and an army under this Makota was opposed to them. But there was no fighting, and instead the combatants watched one

another listlessly, the besiegers unable to attack, simply because they possessed no leader who had the courage to direct them, and the rebels because they were too few. Instead, therefore, the first lounged the days away, while the Dyaks and Malays who were in rebellion sought for food, of which they were in great need. And all the while the country was at a stand-still, there was no trade, while the wretched people were rapidly becoming destitute.

"It was at this juncture that Mr. Brooke came to the rescue. Having looked into the matter thoroughly, and run back to Singapore for a time, he was at length induced to proceed to the part where the rebels were entrenched; for Muda Hassim had besought his aid. In fact, for three years the latter had been helpless; and all the while he and the Sultan of Borneo were afraid lest, finding that terms were not to be obtained from their own people, the rebels should apply to the men of Sambas, pirates for the most part, to take up their cause. If that were to happen, and the latter be successful, then Sarawak and the neighbourhood would come under the sway of the Dutch, for Sambas was controlled by that nation. Thus, Muda Hassim and the sultan had much to lose, and longer delay might prove disastrous.

"But our friend was not the man to enter upon a conflict of this nature for the purpose of gain, and it was only when he became convinced of the misery which existed on account of the rebellion, and of the starving condition of the people, that he finally consented to accompany Muda Hassim to the army and see what could be done.

"I will not tell you any of the details, Richardson, for they are of little interest, but will simply say that the energy of this Englishman soon brought an end to the little war. A rush on the part of his men, with himself at their head, soon changed the ideas of the rebels—so much so that Mr. Brooke was able to make terms with them and induce them to surrender. Finally, with the help of his crew he prevented all attempts at massacre, which would have taken place had it not been for his watchfulness, and, having obtained hostages,

sent the rebels to their homes. There, that is the first step in the present rajah's popularity. He showed these natives that he was bold and strong, while at the same time he gained their confidence, for he would not permit a beaten foe to be ill-treated, and once the war was over he set about increasing the prosperity of the natives, instead of robbing them and making them even more miserable than before, as would have been the case had anyone else been in his place. Indeed, he had many a wordy fight with this man Macota, and with Muda Hassim too, before he gained security for the defeated rebels, and many a time afterwards, had it not been for his energy and his powerful influence, robbery and violence would have been practised upon the humble Dyaks of the interior. And so, little by little did his fame reach the ears of far-distant people, till the name of Brooke, the great and powerful Englishman, the defender of the weak and poor, the friend of all Dyaks and the enemy of all rogues and pirates, become one to conjure with. Indeed, if not rajah in fact, he was as good as leader of this province, and when at last the sultan conferred the title upon him, and handed over the government of Sarawak to our friend and his heirs for ever, the people received him with gladness, and save for a few, such as Makota, and others who had fallen foul of him, accepted him as their chief with every sign of satisfaction.

"From that moment Rajah Brooke has been busily engaged in touring through his district, in issuing laws for the guidance of the people, and in suppressing all attempts at slavery, all head-hunting, and all acts of violence and robbery. So energetic has he been, so powerful has he become, that all who are bent on the old life fear him more than a little, while the majority, the Dyaks of the interior, the peaceful Malays, and the hard-working and ever-contented Chinese—all, in fact, who long for a life spent in agriculture, in mining, or in trade—have settled down wonderfully, placing full reliance in the Englishman and in his word that, so far as he can prevent it, they shall be undisturbed.

"But reform cannot be brought about in a day, or in a year for the matter of that, and there are still numbers of Dyaks who, instead of using all their energies in trade, have constant wars with one another, often with the sole object of obtaining heads. Then, too, the pirates have always been a severe thorn in the side of our friend, and, indeed, have become so audacious that the *Dido* has been sent to render help to the English rajah. And that is the reason why you failed to find her at Singapore, and also for our sailing from China. But you are here at last, and will be able to tell us much that is valuable, for our commander and the rajah have put their heads together, and have decided to hunt these pirates out of their nests. Those at Sarebus, or, I ought to say, at Paddi, on the Sarebus river, will come in for particular attention, for the Dutchmen who commanded them have made them notorious. In fact, had it not been for their presence I doubt that so many ships of European build would have been set upon, for the Malays fear a white man more than they do fifty or sixty of the Dyaks. However, these Dutchmen have led them, and have done much harm to the trade with Singapore. For that reason partly, and now because you tell us that one has committed a deliberate murder, we shall pay attention to Paddi, and before very long, I hope, we shall be able to let everyone know that the pirates who live there are no more.

"But come. We will call for some refreshment, and when we have finished, the rajah should make his appearance, for it is already near to nightfall, and it is his custom to return before that hour if possible."

The officer went to a bell and sounded it with a stick which hung beside it. Then, on a Dyak lad presenting himself, he spoke a few words of English, which, with a few in the native tongue, helped to make his wants known.

"They are wonderfully sharp, as I dare say you have observed," he said as he threw himself back in his chair, "and this lad who serves the rajah is very quick at gathering one's meaning. But we have still a little time before us, my lad,

and if you are not too tired I'd like to hear more of your story. I have told you what I know of the rajah, and it is only fair that you should let me know how it was that you reached your ship. Come, you sailed from Singapore, hoping to pick up the *Dido* in these seas, in which attempt you have been successful. You ran foul of this Dutchman, by name Hanns Schlott—for whom his countrymen are looking, so I hear,—and you took to the land. Then you seem to have made friends with a tribe of Dyaks, in what manner I do not know; and finally you have come to Sarawak with a fleet of prahus which you and this small army took from the pirates of Sarebus. That is the bare outline as you gave it to me, but there must be more behind, and I should be glad to listen to the tale. Out with it, and do not keep back a single item."

Lieutenant Horton turned upon Tyler with an encouraging smile, and then sat watching him as he told of the adventures which had befallen himself and John Marshall on their way to Sarawak.

"You will do well, and deserve to have early mention in the despatches which our commander will send to the admiral," said the lieutenant when the tale was finished; "and it is easy to see that you and the boatswain have had many an anxious moment. For myself, the conflict with the mias seems to be the most dangerous, for the natives in these parts tell stories of how the orang-outang can fight. In any case they are fierce-looking monsters, and I am sure that there are few who would willingly place themselves in reach of such murderous teeth and arms. Indeed, many in your case would have been content to lie in the jungle and remain hidden, for these Dyaks might well have proved enemies, and for the sake of their own safety might have handed you over to the Dutchman and his pirates. However, all turned out well, and you are here. But what is that? Ah, the rajah has returned, and here he comes!"

He sprang from his seat to greet a tall gentleman who entered the room at that moment, and then introduced Tyler.

"A new arrival," he said with a smile. "Come to join the *Dido*, but by the strangest route possible. Permit me to present Mr. Tyler Richardson, who was granted a commission for bravery in England, where he rescued two naval officers from a grain ship, in the hold of which they had been overcome by foul gas which had accumulated; and who, on his way to join the *Dido*, has crossed many miles of Borneo, arriving here with a tribe of friendly Dyaks, and with an imposing fleet of prahus, captured from the redoubtable Dutchman who commands the pirates of Sarebus."

"Journey across Borneo! Sarebus pirates!" cried the newcomer, a tall energetic-looking man, with clean-shaven and handsome features. "Impossible! But, your pardon! I did not mean that. I caught sight of the strange vessels lying beside the *Royalist* and the *Dido*, and knowing by that fact that they could not be enemies, I hastened here with the intention of sending off at once to ascertain where they came from. You see," he added with a little smile, "we have to be careful of all strangers, for a fleet of prahus is apt to be manned by pirates, and should they manage to escape the notice of our ships, and pass our guns, the poor Dyaks up the river would suffer. But I am interrupting. You spoke of the Dutchman, Horton. What is the meaning of this riddle? Surely you cannot mean that Mr. Richardson has been to Paddi, that he has been a captive there? A Malay might have that fortune, but an Englishman is never taken prisoner. He is killed without any mercy."

"And so would our young friend have been," was the prompt reply. "The facts are as I briefly stated them, Rajah. This young officer was compelled to take to the land, and there he fell in with some Dyaks, who feared the pirates. Together they have made for Sarawak, and on their way here have contrived to capture or sink every prahu lying at Paddi, while they have brought with them a ship lately taken from the traders of Singapore, together with a child and her nurse. But there; he has just given me the yarn, and it will not

hurt him to repeat it, particularly when he is aware that the facts will be of the utmost importance."

Thus bidden, Tyler repeated his story, the Rajah of Sarawak listening carefully to every word, and interrupting him at times to ask questions as to the exact position of the stronghold at Paddi, the strength of the enemy, and the precautions taken against attack.

"You have done us a great service," said the latter at length, when he had obtained all the details, "for you are, with the exception of these rascally Dutchmen, the only white men who have ascended the Sarebus river. Thanks to you and your comrade, we shall be able to increase our knowledge of the various bends and reaches, and, with the information we already have derived from the natives, shall be able to find our way to Paddi. But Rembas must be seen to first before we come to this Hanns Schlott. However, the odds shall not deter us, for these pirates must and shall be exterminated. They are the one great drawback to my scheme, and were it not for them the natives of this part of Borneo would already be settling down to a life of peace and prosperity. As it is, their goods and their lives are never safe, while in the country commanded and reached by the tributaries of the Sarebus the condition of the unfortunate people is similar to that which existed here on my arrival, when the rebellion was in progress. Yes, an expedition shall be arranged without delay, and with you to guide us, Mr. Richardson, and the men of the *Dido* and of the *Royalist* to follow us, we will sweep these pests away and bring happiness and prosperity to the people. But it is already dark and I am detaining you. Please come here again to-morrow, so that I may talk the matter over more fully."

With a hearty shake of the hand he dismissed them, the lieutenant and Tyler returning at once to the *Dido*, where the latter found that all was in readiness for him. Indeed, thanks to the fact that the tale of his adventures had buzzed through the ship, his comrades, who were all of about his own

age, having already had more than a year's service, greeted him as if he were an old messmate, and carried him away to their own special sanctum without delay, there to pour questions innumerable upon him, and to beg of him to tell them everything. But they were destined to be disappointed, for scarcely had Tyler seated himself than a marine arrived at the door with a request that he would dine in the captain's cabin, and thither he betook himself without delay. When he retired to his hammock that night, and rolled himself in a blanket, it was with the knowledge that stirring times were ahead, and that ere many days had elapsed he and his new friends would be on their way to Sarebus, there to come hand to hand with the pirates.

CHAPTER XIV

A Dangerous Enterprise

"PASS the word for Mr. Richardson, please. He's wanted in the captain's cabin immediately."

The order, conveyed by means of a marine, was called in stentorian tones down the companion ladder leading to the narrow quarters in which Tyler had breakfasted, and brought him to his feet with a flush upon his cheeks.

"A wigging! He's going to catch it nicely!" sang out one of his new messmates, giving vent to a bantering laugh. "The skipper wants to know what he means to do with his fleet, and whether he has made arrangements to victual his Dyaks. Stand aside there, you fellows, and permit the admiral to pass! This way, sir, and if you're wanting a mate of sorts, why, look about you, for here are the men!"

The young fellow who had shouted the words indulged in a comical grimace, and placing his hand to his heart bowed in mock deference to the lad who, up to a few hours before, had, indeed, been as good as an admiral, for he had had command of quite a number of vessels, while the fate of many individuals had been in his hands. However, Tyler was not the one to take offence, particularly when his comrades had greeted him in such a manner, and with a laugh, and a sudden dash at the banterer which sent the latter sprawling on one side, he gained the companion and commenced to mount to the deck above.

"Right!" he called back with a merry laugh, "you shall all come with me, and as for the victualling, you shall have the management of that, for you have shown that you possess

a hearty appetite, which will keep the food question before you. But sorry I can't wait, you fellows. I'll send for my first mate when I want him!"

A roar of good-natured laughter followed him up the ladder, and he emerged upon the deck with smiling features, well pleased with the manner in which he was treated by those with whom he had to live. Then, straightening his dress, he went aft to the cabin in which Captain Keppel had his quarters, and was announced by the marine who stood on guard outside the door.

"Mr. Tyler Richardson," said the latter, throwing open the door. "Shall he enter, sir?"

"Show him in, please," was the answer, "and send to Lieutenant Horton with my compliments and with the request that he will kindly attend here."

Next moment Tyler found himself in the presence of his commanding officer, before whom he stood cap in hand.

"Come and sit here," said Captain Keppel, taking him by the shoulder, "and make yourself comfortable, for I am going to have a discussion in which you will have to take a part. You must know that Mr. Brooke has at length managed to arouse the interest of the Government, who have for very many years been indifferent to the trade which might result to England by suppressing bloodshed in these parts, and in consequence the *Dido* has been sent here to help him, and with the main object of putting an end to these acts of piracy which are so frequent, and which invariably end in cruel murders and in slavery. That is the way. Sit down in that chair, and try to remember every point in your journey down the river Sarebus, for the information which you can give us will be of the utmost value. But tell me, have you seen the little captive since you brought her to Sarawak?"

"She was taken ashore at once, sir," responded Tyler, his interest in the child being at once aroused. "You see, while on the schooner I had so many things to arrange and to look to that I never had an opportunity of speaking to the captives,

or of asking them how it was that they had fallen into the hands of the Dutchman."

"Then I can tell you all about them," said the captain. "The child is the daughter of a naval officer stationed with the China fleet, and at present doing duty at Hong-Kong. She was on her way home to England for the purpose of education, and was despatched by a schooner which would take her to Singapore, where she would tranship to a mail boat bound for home waters. The tale of her capture is nothing out of the ordinary, and it suffices to say that this scoundrel of a Dutchman, of whom I hope to hear more, came upon the vessel and took her without difficulty, for she was manned by Chinese for the most part. They were killed at once, while the nurse and the child were kept, probably with the idea that money might be obtained for them. It was a gallant deed, Mr. Richardson, and reflects the greatest credit upon you, for it would have been far easier and far less dangerous for you to have gone off with the prahus and your followers, leaving the two to their fate.

"But there, I see that you do not like to hear much about that part of the matter; though before dropping the subject I consider that it is only right for me to acquaint you with the fact that I have given a full description of the rescue in despatches which I wrote after your arrival here, and also that I have sent a letter to the officer whose child you rescued.

"And now let us turn to these pirates, for I hear Mr. Horton's step outside."

He turned to greet the chief officer of the *Dido*, and having motioned him to a chair, placed himself at the end of the dining-table which occupied a central position in the cabin.

"Oblige me by drawing closer," he said, "and cast your eyes over these rough charts. They are some which I have prepared with the help of natives who have ascended the Sarebus, and may or may not be correct. And now, Mr.

Richardson, kindly tell me which are the towns on the river, adding any points which may be of importance."

Thus bidden, Tyler scanned the charts which his commander put before him, and having asked for a pen and ink, and for a piece of blank paper, began at once to sketch the true course of the river, as observed by himself when escaping from Paddi.

"Rembas is the first of the strongholds, and is said to be the most powerful," he remarked. "But we had the good fortune to pass the pirates of that name, they mistaking us for friends. Pakoo comes next, and then Paddi, where this Dutchman has his residence. The river there divides into two, and Paddi is placed on the tongue of land between the two tributaries."

"And what about the bore?" demanded Captain Keppel eagerly. "I am told that these pirates seem not to fear attack, and, indeed, scarcely make any preparations for defence, except such as is necessary to keep native tribes out, for they imagine that this bore protects them. It is caused by the tide running into a wide mouth, and then suddenly finding only a narrow course. The mass of water is still forced on, and, unable to spread to either side, it rises till it forms quite a wall, and advances up the river in that manner."

"With the result that it swamps any but boats of fairly large size," added the lieutenant. "At least, that is the account which the rajah gave me, and he heard the tale from natives who had ascended the river."

"It may be so," Tyler answered, "but we did not meet with this bore on our way down to the sea. Should there be such a thing, and I can well imagine it, considering the straight course of the river and the manner in which it suddenly narrows, it would not be very difficult to avoid being swamped, for the bore will come with the tide, and at that time any boats which might be conveying an expedition could be rowed into a bay or creek, many of which exist all along the banks."

"And in there they could lie in safety!" exclaimed the

commander of the *Dido*, looking swiftly at his first officer. "It is a good suggestion, Mr. Richardson, and I now perceive how it is that you managed to bring the tribe of Dyaks through. Depend upon it, the man—or lad for the matter of that, for you are scarcely more—who is gifted with common sense, and with sufficient steadiness to use it, finds his resources many, and a way out of difficulties which would be unsurmountable to others less inclined to think. Then you would lie up in one of these creeks if you were in command of the expedition?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tyler with a flush. "I should row up for a quarter of a mile, and then, if it were possible, I should disembark and haul each boat into the jungle. Then there would be no danger of being swamped, and once the bore had passed the expedition could push on again."

"And probably take the enemy by surprise, for the latter would hardly expect them, and would, in fact, believe that all had been drowned by the bore. Yes, the plan will prove a good one, I am sure. And now to discuss the other part, and to obtain a full description of the river from you."

For more than an hour did the three pore over the charts, and discuss the measures to be taken for the suppression of the pirates. Then Tyler was addressed once more by his commander.

"And now I have a request to make," said the latter gravely, turning to him slowly and scanning his features closely, as though he would read his character by that means. "You have had more fortune than falls to the lot of the vast majority of young fellows, for you have passed through part of a country which is considered impossible for Englishmen, a part where the Dutch have never dared to go. Moreover, you have met these pirates face to face, and you have beaten them soundly; not in actual hand-to-hand combat, you understand me, but in wits, in sharpness and decision. Thanks to you and the information which you have given so clearly, we are in a better position now to attack these pests than ever

before. But we are ignorant of the special precautions which they will take; for, rest assured, they will hear of this intended expedition, for their friends and sympathizers are everywhere, and Sarawak is not without spies who carry tales to the enemy. That being the case, they will make strenuous efforts to resist us, for they have existed for a century and more and no one has ever been successful in repressing them. For that reason they will fight the harder to beat us back, and as a careful leader, who desires to lose as few men as possible, I wish for fuller information if it can be obtained. You have once before been in disguise. Will you don the same dress again, and go to the Sarebus river in advance of our party, with the object of spying upon the pirates, and of furnishing us with a warning as to their intended movement?"

For more than a minute did Captain Keppel keep his eyes fixed upon our hero, searching closely as if to see whether he would flinch at such a request, or show by a twitch of the lips, a wavering eye, or in some other manner, that the task was likely to be too much, and would make too great a call upon his fortitude.

"Mind," he went on, seeing that Tyler returned his searching gaze unflinchingly and without so much as a tremor, "I make a definite request, a suggestion that you should undertake this matter, for I am well aware that you are the most fitted for it. But I realize the great danger to be incurred, particularly when I bear in mind the fact that you have a personal enemy in this rascally Dutchman, who has sworn to obtain your head; and for that reason, and because a task of this description is essentially one for a volunteer, I make no order. I do not, on the strength of my being the commander of this vessel, while you are a subordinate, tell you that you are to go. Come, think the matter over. Go to your quarters and discuss it if you wish, returning here in a couple of hours, when you will have had time to make up your mind. And recollect this, that should you refuse to undertake the task I shall not think the worse of you, for the adventure will be

full of danger and difficulty, and will take you right amongst the pirates and amongst enemies from whom you were most fortunate to escape."

Once more did the captain of the *Dido* lean back in his chair while he gazed at our hero. But, had he expected to find any hesitation on the latter's part to accept the post assigned to him, he was destined to be mistaken, for not once had Tyler shown the slightest trace of fear.

"I would have answered at once," he said, suddenly breaking the silence which he had maintained up to this, "but I have been busily thinking whether I could possibly do as you say, whether the disguise of a native of these parts would be sufficient, seeing that I am wholly ignorant of the language. But what I have done once I can attempt again, and I thank you, sir, for giving me the opportunity. I do not require to think it over, as my mind is already made up. I will do my best to obtain the fullest information, and bring you warning of the movements of the pirates. When can I set out?"

"As soon as you are ready, my lad; and let me say that I admire you for giving a decision so readily. There are few who would undertake the matter, and, as I have said, not many who could make the attempt with as much hope of success as yourself. You will, of course, want a companion, for you do not speak the Dyak language, and might get into difficulties. Make your own selection and your own plans without reference to me, for you have shown such sense up to this that I can trust you to choose well. When you are quite prepared for the journey, come to me, and I will give you any further instructions which I may happen to have."

"And perhaps it would be as well, considering the fact that Sarawak has many spies, to beg Mr. Richardson to keep silence on the matter," broke in Lieutenant Horton. "After all, a discussion amongst the other officers might find its way elsewhere, and spoil our young friend's chances of success."

"And perhaps endanger his life," said Captain Keppel

eagerly. "Quite right, Mr. Horton! and I thank you for the advice. Very well, my lad, return as soon as you are ready, and tell me then how you mean to tackle this matter. Remember that I leave it all to you, including the means by which you are to reach the Sarebus."

With a bow and a hearty shake of the hand, which was repeated by the first officer, Tyler was dismissed, and at once walked forward into the bows of the *Dido*, well knowing that he would have no opportunity for thinking if he rejoined his comrades below. Behind him he left the two officers, still conversing eagerly, and wondering how this quiet young fellow, who had joined the ship in such strange fashion and after the most extraordinary adventures, would elect to carry out the matter which had been entrusted to him.

"He is decidedly older than his age," remarked the lieutenant, "and I will wager that he carries the task through brilliantly. He has his head screwed on, and has a fine spirit. We shall see him charging at the head of our men before these pirates are done with, and I prophesy quick promotion for him. But I will leave you now, sir, if you no longer require me, for I may be able to help our young friend in this matter."

While the commander of the *Dido* remains in his cabin or on the poop of his vessel, restlessly trudging backwards and forwards, with his thoughts for ever bent upon the coming expedition and upon the precautions necessary to be taken, let us once more seek for Tyler in the secluded spot away in the bows of the ship, where he had hidden himself, well knowing that only there would he obtain that peace and uninterrupted quietness which would permit him to give his full attention to the journey which was before him. Seating himself upon the sprit, where it came in through the rail, he bent his head on his hand for the space of a few moments, while he rubbed his eyes as though the action would enable him to see clearly into the future. Then he turned his gaze in the direction of Sarawak, and let his eyes pass from hut to

hut, from the so-called palace of Rajah Brooke, the great Englishman who had devoted himself to the cause of the Dyaks and of all people inhabiting that portion of Borneo, to the quaint and straggling street which cut through the main part of the town. Then, dreamily, and as if his thoughts were too much occupied to take in all the details, he allowed his view to cross a strip of jungle and fall upon a neat and orderly settlement beyond. Houses built of bamboo, and displaying many a flaring signboard in front, were clustered together in an orderly manner, while many a thin wisp of smoke curled into the air. And about the houses, engaged in the yards which most seemed to have attached to them, were numbers of figures, working for their living, at peace with all the world, and settled in this town of Sarawak as if they had been there for years.

"Busy fellows," thought Tyler, suddenly attracted by the scene, and indulging in a closer look. "The Chinaman is a wonderful worker, and a very contented man. And I suppose that Li Sung is over there, having found his wife and child."

He ceased speaking, and looked again with increased attention. Then he rose to his feet, and, leaning on the rail, stared at the collection of huts.

"He is a shrewd fellow," he murmured, as though some thought had suddenly come to him. "All Chinamen are clever and cunning; and Li is thoroughly trustworthy. I will go across to him and chat the matter over."

Conscious that the expedition before him was one which demanded no little thought, and that to attempt to carry it out hastily, and with little preparation, could only lead to misfortune, Tyler had determined to take every precaution, and make every necessary enquiry before setting out.

"Then whom else could I go to who is better able to give advice?" he said to himself. "Li is a faithful fellow, and I believe is attached to me. He has suffered at the hands of these pirates, and he will be glad to see them exterminated.

If I go to him he will be able to give me a hint as to a disguise, and I can rely upon him to keep a silent tongue in his head. I'll go across at once."

To act upon this decision was the work of a few moments only, for about the *Dido*, keeping, however, at a respectful distance, a number of native craft always hovered during the day. To hail a sampan, therefore, was an easy matter, and very soon Tyler was being ferried to the shore.

"I quite forgot to ask permission to go!" he exclaimed, suddenly recollecting that he was no longer his own master, and that he was subject to the discipline of the ship. "However, I dare say that they will accept my excuses, particularly when they hear for what reason I have gone. Ah! here we are, and a short walk will take me to the Chinese town."

Leaping upon the little landing-stage which had been erected, he tossed a coin to the oarsman, for the paymaster of the *Dido* had advanced him a couple of months' pay. Then he strode off towards the houses which he had seen from the ship, and was very soon in the street which divided the dwellings.

"Where is Li Sung?" he demanded of the first man he met.

"Li Sung? Ah, him comee here wid de Dyaks and de whitee man!" said the Chinee, using the curious pigeon-English which is common to men of the race who attempt our language. "Yes, you findee him dere;" and he pointed to one of the neat houses. "Li him velly sad."

"Sad! For what reason?" thought Tyler. Then, thanking the man, he strode to the door of the house and knocked, entering as a voice bade him do so.

"What is the matter?" he demanded, suddenly catching sight of a figure huddled in a corner. "Is that you, Li Sung?"

At the sound of his voice the Chinaman sprang to his feet with a cry of delight, exposing, however, a face which was woebegone to the last degree. Then he darted forward and clasped Tyler by the hand.

"Li am velly sad man," he said. "He comee through so much, and he lookee to de time when he comee home and meet him wife and child. But dey not here, massa. Dey tink poor Li dead, he stay away so long, and dey sail back to Singapore. Li all alonee!"

"Then you will be able to listen to me, and it will do you good not to think of your trouble," said Tyler, taking him kindly by the arm. "You can help me if you will."

"Den I listen, for Li am de servant. De massa am always kind to de Chinee boy. He no kickee and hitee him, and him bringee Li through wid de Dyaks. What does de massa say?"

"That you can do something for me. Come, let us sit down and talk."

Taking their seats beside one another, Tyler began to tell Li Sung of the task before him; then for an hour or more the two chatted in low whispers, the Chinaman asking many a question, and lapsing into silence, often for the space of a minute, as he considered the matter.

"De plan do velly well," he said at length, with smiling features, which were a contrast indeed to the air of sorrow which he had worn when first his white master had accosted him. "De way to Paddi am open, and de Chinamen go dere velly easy. De massa am wise, for he tink of dis, and he say to Li: 'You comee wid me, and later on you havee money to go to Singapore.' Dat allee dat Li want, and him not afraid of de Dutchman."

"I should think not!" exclaimed Tyler, delighted at the thought that he had obtained a companion who would be so useful to him. "As you say, the plan seems a good one, and I do not see why we should not be successful. All depends on the disguise, and upon whom we meet in the river. But we have been talking for long. Let us set about the preparations without further delay."

Some two hours later, when the sun was overhead, and a hot haze hung over the water, a sampan was seen to be rowing from the creek upon the banks of which the Chinese town was

situated, and was observed to direct its course towards the *Dido*. At first the marine who was doing sentry-go at the summit of the gangway paused listlessly in his weary tramp, glad of anything, however small, which would break the monotony of his hours of duty, and favoured the craft with a half-pitying gaze. Then he stifled a yawn, remarked upon the heat and discomfort of such latitudes when compared to Old England, and would have pursued his beat had not a second movement on the part of the sampan attracted his attention.

"Well, that does for me!" he exclaimed, bringing his musket from the shoulder to the deck with a clash which startled the mid-day silence. "Making this way against orders! All these here blacks, and the China boys too, know well that the rule is that they are not to come alongside unless a chief or big gun o' some sort is along with 'em. And here's a sampan, with a couple of cheeky chaps aboard, making direct for us! Who knows? they might have a keg of powder aboard. Hi, you two monkeys! Clear right off, or I'll—!"

He brought the butt of his musket to his shoulder and made pretence to aim. Then, as the Chinaman who occupied a seat in front of the one who was plying the oars rose to his feet and faced about, the sentry came to the rail, and leaned over it to inspect the craft and its contents more closely.

"It ain't no use yer kow-towing," he called out, seeing that the individual who had just risen to his feet was bowing to him. "I tell yer that it ain't allowed, so clear off, and quick about it too."

Whether the Chinaman understood what was said it would be difficult to state, but it would appear as though he did, for he at once thrust his hand into the interior of his capacious coat and produced a document, which he held above his head.

"For de chief!" he called out. "Dis am a letter, and de man here and me comee to speak to de captain about de pirates."

"Oh, yer've got a letter, 'ave yer? Well, sit tight there

till I've called the sergeant," shouted the sentry. "Hi, sergeant, there's two China boys wanting to come aboard!"

A few minutes' parley sufficed to obtain the necessary permission, and then the two Chinamen having been searched to make sure that they carried no arms and had no murderous intentions, they were allowed to mount the gangway and step upon the deck.

"This way," said the sergeant, "and jest stop that 'ere kow-towing. I ain't the captain."

Apparently it annoyed him to see the Chinamen bobbing there in that senseless way, for he turned from them with a scowl and led the way to the poop, where Captain Keppel was standing.

"Two men to see yer, sir," he said, shouldering his musket in salute. "Two Chinamen, what says they've a letter for yer. Shall they come up, sir?"

"A letter! Two Chinamen! Perhaps they have some information about the pirates!" exclaimed the commander with a start. "Send them up, sergeant."

A minute later the two strangers were before him, to find that his chief officer had joined him, while both were staring at these intruders, no doubt wondering what information they had to bring.

"Well, what is it?" demanded the commander. "You have a letter, and as far as I have been led to understand, you have some information to give me. Now, get along with the business, and do stop that kow-towing."

At the words a half-hidden smile wreathed the features of the man who had stood up in the craft, and who had had possession of the letter. But in a moment it was suppressed, and, at once ceasing the bows with which he had favoured the white man, he drew the document out of an inner pocket and handed it to the captain.

"Dat am de plan of de river Sarebus," he said. "Fo Sing knowee de water velly well, and Li Sung been dere many a time. De news in de town am dat de Englishmen am to go

to de river to fight de pirate, and Fo Sing and Li Sung comee here to say dat dey willee go dere too, and take de news to de pirates. If we not go, den de news reach dem all de same. But s'posing we am dere, den we makee friends, we laugh and we eat wid de pirate, and one velly fine day we come away again, and tell de Englishmen allee dat we see."

"Why, the man is proposing exactly what we had arranged!" gasped Captain Keppel. "But I must keep that to myself. What do you think of this offer, Horton? It seems uncanny that these fellows should have come at such a time. One really begins to think that they have guessed our plans."

"They can hardly have done that, sir," was the answer. "But would not a second party be advisable? Then if one failed—you understand?"

"Quite so, exactly, though I trust that there will be no mishap. But this fellow says that he has been to the Sarebus before. Probably one of the pirates, if one could only get at the truth."

"Yes, that may be the case," replied the chief officer, with elevated eyebrows, "but a Chinaman will do anything for gold. Here, what are you asking for this work?"

He turned to the spokesman of the two who had come aboard, and demanded his price, while he stared closely at him, watching him narrowly.

"For me, nothing, sir. I shall do my utmost for the navy. For Li Sung, the Chinaman who accompanied me through a part of Borneo, and then down the Sarebus, he asks merely that a passage shall be paid for him so that he may sail for Singapore, there to rejoin his wife and family."

In a moment the tones of the Chinaman's voice had changed, and the captain of the *Dido* and his chief officer found themselves listening to the young fellow who had so recently joined them. In utter amazement they stared at him, only to find that he returned their glances gravely, and with never a smile, for Tyler was in desperate earnest, and had come aboard in this manner, not to make fun of those who were his superiors.

but to test the effectiveness of his disguise. Seeing that matters had gone far enough already, and that, in spite of the brilliant light, and of the fact that Captain Keppel and Mr. Horton were so close to him, they had failed to recognize him, he at once spoke in his natural tones, so that it might become clear who he was.

"What! Impossible!" exclaimed the commander, stepping forward swiftly and thrusting his face close to Tyler's. "Mr. Richardson in disguise! It cannot be; for this is a real Chinaman if ever I saw one. What do you say, Horton?"

"It is wonderful. The lad would pass inspection anywhere, and has completely taken us in. I have no fears for him, for, dressed as he is, even the Dutchman will fail to recognize him. But what are we to do? It will never do to declare who is here, for the tale would fly round the deck, and our men would have it before half an hour had passed."

"And the safety of the expedition and of these two might be jeopardized," cried the commander. "Come down to the cabin, Mr. Richardson, and leave your companion here with instructions to say nothing and to keep his tongue between his teeth."

As if too dazed to say more, Captain Keppel turned about and led the way to his cabin, the chief officer following closely upon his heels, and Tyler bringing up the rear, kow-towing with the gravest of faces and the most servile of manners as they passed him. Once the door had closed upon them, however, the officers burst into hearty roars of laughter, and for some little time could do nothing more than stare at our hero and walk round and round him, closely scrutinizing his apparel. And well they might, too, for the special duty which was about to take Tyler to the Sarebus was one fraught with the gravest danger, and he was well aware that discovery would mean death. For that reason Li Sung had taken the utmost pains to transform him, and, thanks to the fact that on this occasion he was at home, and surrounded with all that was necessary for the purpose, he had contrived to provide a disguise which could not have been improved

upon. Indeed, as he stood there in the cabin, Tyler was a Chinaman from his bald pate, with its dangling pigtail, to his thick-soled shoes. Nothing had been passed over, and so clever and painstaking had been Li Sung that the eyes seemed to be precisely the same as those possessed by the normal Chinaman. In short, as the interview upon the poop had proved, no one could recognize in the taller of the two Chinaman the young officer who had but just come to the ship; while even the leader of the pirates at Paddi would have passed him by without a suspicion that this humble individual, who seemed to find it necessary to kow-tow to every person of note or of the smallest consequence, was the Englishman for whom he sought, and whom he had last encountered in the guise of a Dyak chief.

"Your acting is superb," Captain Keppel was at length able to blurt out, "and I must really congratulate you, Mr. Richardson, upon the excellence of your appearance. But tell me how you propose to proceed? Surely, if you go up the river as you are, they will think that you are a man of some wealth and will pounce upon you, for your clothes are better than those worn, as a rule, by the Chinamen here."

"They are put on simply for the purpose of coming here, sir," replied Tyler earnestly. "If one of the country which I am supposed to represent had occasion to come to you, he would certainly don his best clothing for the purpose. But I shall take others with me, and once up the river I have but to strip off these outer garments and I become in a moment a coolie, one of the men who is to be come across in every part, at work upon the forest-trees, preparing a clearing in which to cultivate rice. The pirates do not molest them as a rule, though the Chinaman's fear of the former makes him keep at a distance from them generally. As to the river, sir, I shall act as circumstances demand, but my idea is to row boldly up to Rembas or to Pakoo and make friends with the pirates, with the idea of escaping later on."

"It sounds terribly risky, my lad," exclaimed Captain

Keppel, as though a feeling of remorse had suddenly come to him for having selected this young officer for such a task. "Do you think that it will be necessary to actually throw in your lot with these men?

"But, no—I will not interfere in any manner," he cried, after a moment's thought, interrupting Tyler before he could give an answer to the question. "I will leave the carrying out of the duty entirely to you, well knowing that you will not be impetuous, and that you have had an experience already which will be invaluable. You shall leave this ship when our chat is ended, and shall make your way to the Sarebus when and how you like. On your return to the *Dido* I shall have something to say, and let me remind you now that we have appointed the island at the mouth of the river as a rendezvous, and that we shall sail there shortly after you have left us. Till we meet—the very best of fortune, my dear lad! As to getting there, I may say that the men who are looking after the prahus which you brought from the Sarebus will at once hand any of the vessels over when you show them this order."

Stepping to a bureau, which was fastened to one wall of the cabin, the commander of the *Dido* scrawled a few hurried lines, and then handed the note to Tyler. A second later the latter was kow-towing himself from the presence of the two officers, his fingers aching with the hearty shake and grip which each had given him.

"A remarkably fine young fellow, and with wits!" exclaimed the captain. "He is an acquisition, Horton, and is as smart an officer as I ever came across."

"And he is not spoilt by success, as so many would be, sir," burst in the lieutenant. "He is always in earnest, it seems to me, unless skylarking with lads of his own age, and he is clever. Look at the way he acted. Why, even a moment ago he did not allow himself to forget his rôle, and I'll be bound that the marine on sentry-go outside has not the faintest idea who it was he passed on to the deck."

That this was the case was abundantly evident, and had the door only remained open, those within the cabin would have quickly learnt the fact; for no sooner had the door closed than the sentry, an ill-conditioned fellow with a particular dislike to foreigners, grasped the Chinaman by the shoulders and hustled him on to the deck without ceremony. Then with a scowl and a "Git on with yer!" he went back to his beat, little thinking that his act was one likely to entail serious consequences later on.

But Tyler did not allow his temper to be ruffled, and, hastening along the deck, soon joined Li Sung. A moment or two later they were passing down the gangway, and very soon the two officers, watching from the gun-port in the cabin right aft, saw a tiny sampan swing out into the stream and pull for the prahus which lay moored some little distance away. A strong pull and it disappeared from sight, leaving the watchers to wonder when they would see Tyler Richardson again, and what would be his tale when he rejoined them.

CHAPTER XV

Off to the River Sarebus

ARMED with the note with which the captain of the *Dido* had had the forethought to provide him, Tyler made direct for the prahus which had been such a short while before in the possession of the men at Paddi, and, still acting the rôle of a humble Chinee, clambered to the deck of one upon which he caught sight of some British sailors.

"From de captain," he said quietly. "Him say dat Fo Sing ask for one of de boats and takee him away a little."

Tearing the letter open, the man to whom he had handed it read the contents with a puzzled expression, for he was no great scholar.

"Deliver to the bearer, Fo Sing, any of the prahus which he may ask for, and do not question him," ran the lines.

"Well, it's a rum order, and I can't say as I see what it's for," grumbled the tar, "but it's there, in the skipper's hand, and so it'll have to be. Which'll yer have, Johnnie? There's a number of sail here, and yer are to pick and choose. Jest look round and think a bit."

But Tyler had no need to think, for already he had selected the one which he considered most suitable. And, therefore, he at once motioned to the small prahu with which the head of the schooner had been warped round when she lay at her moorings before the pirates' stockade, and indicated that that was the one which he would select.

"Then you ain't greedy," was the answer, "and since the order's plain, you'd better skip with the craft as soon as yer can, else perhaps the skipper'll change his mind."

This difficulty settled, Tyler with his companion, Li Sung, were not long in transferring themselves to the prahu, and at once, making their sampan fast to her stern, they manned two of the sweeps, and rowed the craft away to the creek from which they had originally set out.

"De China boy dere tink dat we buy him, and so not talk velly much," said Li Sung as they arrived in the tiny harbour. "Be sure dat dey see us comee here, and dey wonder why and who you am. But I tellee dem dat you a friend from de coast, and that satisfy dem. I say dat we go on a trading voyage, and end at Singapore, so dat allee right, for dey know dat poor Li wish to go dere. We must be plenty careful, massa, for dere am bad men everywhere, and here am some who lovee de Dutchman and his pirates."

"Then we will be very cautious," agreed Tyler, "and as I should be certainly questioned if I were to come ashore, I shall remain here till you have been able to do all that I have asked. Food we must have, and for that purpose you will row back to the *Dido* when the night comes, and will take off a supply which will be prepared for you. Then there will be weapons to be fetched also, and another boat is necessary, for to enter the river with this would be madness. We shall want one of the river-boats, which are without decks and which are propelled by means of paddles. Here is money, and you must see what can be done in the matter. Return as soon as the sun falls, and then we will row out to the ship."

Having moored the prahu to a buoy in the centre of the creek, Tyler lay down upon the floor and set himself to think, while Li Sung went ashore in the sampan to carry out his master's wishes. As for the latter, he had already thought the matter over, and realizing at length that no amount of cogitation would help him, for who could say what difficulties would confront him, he settled himself comfortably and very soon fell asleep, overcome by the closeness of the atmosphere. When he awoke it was near the hour of sunset, and happening to peep over the rail he saw a figure approaching him in a

small river-boat which would accommodate two or three men, and could be easily managed by them.

"Good!" he said to himself; "he has managed that part of the matter, and with that craft we ought to be easily able to ascend the river, particularly when the tide makes in. Now for the food and other things."

Two hours later, when the sun had long disappeared and darkness covered the water, the prahu cast loose from her moorings, and was rowed from the creek with the river-boat in tow. Then, once in open water, her sail was hoisted and her head turned down the stream which led from Sarawak to the open sea.

"There will be a moon by the time we arrive at the mouth," said Tyler as they swept along, "and we shall be able to set a course by its aid. After that we can take it turn and turn about to steer and keep a watch. How long will it take us to get to the Sarebus, Li?"

"P'r'aps two day, p'r'aps less, massa. Me no tellee now. Allee according to de wind. Plenty same now, and if him hold, then we make de Sarebus velly soon. But better keep de silence, for dere am ships in de river, and p'r'aps de *Dido* hail for us to stop."

Following this piece of good advice, for in those days none were allowed to arrive in the river or depart from Sarawak without being challenged, Tyler, who was at the helm, directed the prahu for the centre of the stream, and kept her there till well at the mouth. Once someone sent a hail in their direction, but it was instantly suppressed, perhaps by the orders of those on board the *Dido*, who knew that their messenger must be leaving about that hour. After that all was silence and darkness till a gentle swell told them that they were at sea.

"And here is the moon," exclaimed Tyler in tones of satisfaction. "We've a long sail before us, and so I propose that we at once settle the watches. You turn in, Li, while I take her on for three hours. Then you can take the helm. When

day comes we'll pull into some creek, and lie up till night returns. Now, off you go!"

With a nod he sent the Chinaman to the bows, where he at once lay down, and, accustomed to a hard bed and to his surroundings, promptly fell asleep. As for Tyler, he stood upright there beside the helm, wondering what was in store for him, and whether this expedition was destined to result in similar success to that which had favoured the previous one, or whether dire disaster was about to come upon himself and his companion.

"In any case I shall do my best, and can a fellow do more?" he said. "If possible, I shall remain hidden from the pirates, and return without having given them a suspicion that they have been spied upon. But if that is out of the question, I shall go to Rembas or to Pakoo, and trust to luck. To hand myself over to the men at Paddi would be madness, for the Dutchman suspects everyone, and would soon get to the bottom of my disguise. Well, it's no use wondering, so I'll just jog along and be thankful that the night is fine."

For three hours did Tyler maintain his position at the helm, steering a course parallel with the coast, which he was able to distinguish dimly on his right. Then, judging that he had done his turn of duty, he made the tiller fast and went to awake the Chinaman.

"Your watch," he said, as he shook him. "It's a fine night, with a moon and stars, so you will have no difficulty in keeping the course. Wake me if anything disturbs you."

Leaving the prahu in the hands of Li Sung, Tyler lay down in the bows and soon fell asleep, for by now he was hardened to an outdoor life, and had become so used to lying down to rest in a different and a strange place on every occasion, that nothing disturbed him or robbed him of his sleep; indeed, not even the prospect of the expedition before him could keep him awake, while the thought of danger and of difficulty produced no anxiety in his mind.

"I must just do my best, and after all this is a duty for

which I have been selected," he said to himself, as he curled his limbs on the floor of the prahu. "If all goes well, then it will be a fine thing, and no doubt the commander of the *Dido* will be pleased. If we are captured or get into trouble it will be by mischance, and I shall probably not be alive to mind. In any case I cannot alter the future by worrying now, so I'll get a good long sleep so as to be fresh for to-morrow."

With this resolution made, he closed his eyes, and, lulled by the sough of the wind as it bellied the great sail overhead, and by the hiss and swish of water alongside, he quickly lost consciousness, and did not awake till day was dawning.

"Time to open de eyes," said Li Sung as he gently shook his young master. "Velly soon we able to see far, and by den dese two China boys better be hidden away out of de sight."

"And the sooner we are in safe quarters the better," exclaimed Tyler, springing to his feet and rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. "Over with the helm, and let us run in to the land. With a wooded coast before us we shall have no difficulty in finding a likely spot, and then we two—a couple of friendly China boys, as you say—will hide up for the day, and make ready to satisfy our appetites. Ah, the darkness is lifting rapidly, and there is the coast!"

As he spoke he lifted his hand and pointed to a high-lying stretch of land, a strip of the north-western coast of Borneo, which had just come into view.

"Good!" he exclaimed, noticing that it was thickly wooded down to the water's edge. "There will be ample cover there, and as it is just commencing to rain we are not likely to be seen by anyone. Give the tiller over to me, Li Sung, and go forward. If you post yourself in the bows you will be able to keep a look-out for shoals and rocks, and can shout a warning to me. Just pull in that sheet as you go, and we shall sail all the quicker."

Grasping the helm, Tyler set the prahu in the direction of the coast, the Chinaman pulling in the sail till it stretched taut across the mast and allowed them to sail their craft close-

hauled. Then, obedient to the order of his young master, he went forward into the bows, where, reclining at full length, he fastened his pigtail in a knot at the back of his head to keep it from trailing in the water, and then bent his gaze on the surface before him.

"If massa puts de helm a little up we strikee straight for a small place between de trees," he said when they had sailed for some ten minutes through the driving rain. "Li see a creek dere, and he say dat if we sail de prahu right in, den we hidden, and no one see us, for dey all in deir huts just now."

Following the direction indicated by his companion, Tyler pointed the prahu for the opening, which was dimly visible, and soon had the satisfaction of arriving within a few lengths of a rift between the trees, through which a clear stream of water was issuing.

"A tiny river," he said to himself, "and just the place for us, for it will give us shelter, and at the same time will allow us to get our drinking-supply without leaving the vessel. Lower away that sail, Li, for the way on her will carry us in; and stand ready to make fast to a tree. I shall run her in till well out of sight of any who may happen to be cruising along the coast, though we must not go too far, and above all we must find out that there are no natives near at hand. Remember that secrecy is a thing which we have to think of, and our lives may very well depend upon how we observe it."

"Li him knowee dat well, massa," was the answer, the Chinaman nodding his head at Tyler in a manner which seemed to say that he was a cunning fellow. "China boy not wishee to have de head cuttee off. He likee him life, and him can be velly silent when him want. But mind de rock on de side of de opening, for it am big, and de water rises about it."

He pointed swiftly to a spot beside the exit of the river, where the stream frothed and bubbled against some unseen object and was heaped high in the air. But the caution was unneeded, for Tyler had already guessed the cause, and had seen

the commotion in that direction, and, moving his tiller just a trifle, guided the prahu safely past the shoal. A minute later they were running up-stream, with a high bank on either side of them and a canopy of leaves and branches overhead. Selecting a likely-looking tree, our hero steered for it, and, seeing that the banks were soft and moss-grown, ran the bows into the mud close alongside. In an instant Li Sung was overboard, rope in hand, and within a very short space of time the prahu was tugging gently at her mooring as the stream made efforts to bear her down to the sea.

"And now for a look round, and then for something to eat," cried Tyler, beginning to search in the lockers in which their provisions had been stored. "Boiled rice for the Chinaman and his friend, and a little besides. Cut away, Li, and take a look about you. When you return, the water will be hot, and you can complete the cooking."

At once the faithful fellow dived into the jungle which grew close up to the edge of the river, leaving Tyler to make the preparations necessary for a meal. Nor was the latter long in setting about the matter, for his long sail had given him an appetite. Dragging out a kettle, which he filled by dipping it in the stream, he placed it upon an oil-lamp which he had had the forethought to bring with him, and then hunted for the rice, which was the staple food of the Chinaman who accompanied him. A frying-pan soon made its appearance, together with a second stove, and by the time Li Sung returned to the prahu a couple of rashers of bacon were frizzling over the flame, while the kettle was singing merrily.

"De forest am alone, massa," said Li, as he sprang from the bank on to the craft. "Dere no one near, and we can live and sleep here velly fine. Ah, de water am boiling, and Li put de rice in! It am a good ting to eat in de morning."

Thanks to the leafy covering which wrapped them in, Tyler and his companion passed a peaceful day, which was undisturbed by the rain which continued to fall in torrents. Nor did anyone come to upset them. As soon as evening arrived,

and they had eaten another meal, they prepared to set out once more, and at once began to hoist the sail.

"Not start yet awhile," said Li Sung, casting his eyes towards the entrance. "It still am light enough to see out dere, and p'r'aps dere am a ship passing. Wait, and soon we go. Li just run on shore again for a little bittee, and come back wid de coats which keep de rain away."

Without further explanation he leapt to the bank and went into the jungle, where Tyler could hear him breaking branches down. Ten minutes later, as the sun disappeared and darkness began to fall, he leapt once more upon the prahu and presented his master with a mat composed of leaves and reeds which had been roughly secured together.

"Dere," he said in accents of pleasure, "dat light, and stay on de shoulder easy, while it keep de rain away. Massa try him, please."

Motioning to Tyler that he was to put his head through the hole which had been left in the centre, Li spread a mat over his own shoulders, the tail of the leaves falling well over the arms and body, but lying so loosely and lightly that the limbs could be freely moved. And thus equipped with a protection against the rain commonly used by the Dyaks, and known as a kajan, they cast off the mooring, and having hoisted the sail, stood boldly for the sea. Then, turning up the coast, they held on their course without interruption till the following morning found them standing in to the mouth of the river Sarebus.

"And now we must be doubly cautious," said Tyler, as they ran the prahu into an out-of-the-way nook and lowered the sail. "No doubt pirates are about in all directions, and they will be familiar with those who live in the neighbourhood. For that reason they would want to inspect strangers if they happened to see them, and though we look innocent enough, and have a good tale to tell, yet the fact that I do not speak Chinese or the Dyak tongue is so much against me that I should always stand the great risk of being discovered; and if that happened—"

"De pirate choppee de head," exclaimed Li. "Massa no need to tell him servant dat. But we havee velly fine tale to tellee de men of Rembas and of Pakoo, though Li not tink it safe for massa to go to Paddi, where de Dutchman am. We only poor China boys, who not likee de British and deir ships, and who am wanting money. We hear dat de white people come velly soon to fight de pirate, and we come ever so fast to tell him. We say we will fightee for dem, and when dey not lookin' we run away and come back to our friends. Oh yes! Li him see velly clear, and he say dat allee be well. But we must be plenty careful. What does de massa wish to do?"

"Sit down there and listen. I will tell you in a few words, for we are at our destination now, and we must not delay. My proposal is that we make the prahu very fast, so that we may be sure that she will be here on our return. Then we will take to the river-boat and the paddles, and will row into the river, getting as far up-stream as possible before the day dawns. It is already much lighter, though I think that we can count upon a good hour longer. By that time, with the tide to help us, we should be some distance up, and shall, perhaps, have gained a position from which we can set a watch upon our enemies. After that all depends upon the pirates and upon circumstances. Come, bustle up, Li! Get out a gun for each of us, leaving the spare ones here, for we could not manage to carry them. Then we will take a bag of ammunition beneath our coats, for we may suddenly find that we require a large amount, and, of course, we must not forget food. There is a lot of cooked and preserved stuff which will suit very well, and for water we can rely upon the river. There, look lively while I see to the vessel."

At once all was movement upon the prahu, for if Tyler and his companion were really to make a commencement of their task, and were to occupy a position of advantage before the day dawned and the light came to show them to the enemy, they must move without further delay. That both realized this to the full, and that their safety would now depend on

their caution and discretion, was abundantly evident, for they set to work silently, but with a bustle and an energy which showed that their hearts were in the matter. Leaping to the shore, Tyler rapidly bent another cable in position, and lashed it to a tree, just as had been done on the previous night. Then a third was taken from the stern, and the vessel brought tight up against the bank.

"That will do for her, I think," muttered Tyler, running swiftly over the knots to see that they were fast. "If she is found lying here, of course anyone can walk aboard her. But it would have been very difficult to moor her farther out in the stream, and even then a sampan would have taken the finder to her. And now for the river-boat."

Going aft, he found that Li Sung had already provisioned the tiny craft, and was standing in the bows awaiting his master, with a rifle in either hand and a couple of waterproof bags of ammunition over his shoulder.

"Li am ready for massa," he said simply. "Where am he to sit? Li wait for orders, and him will do just what him am told."

"Then stay here in the bows," said Tyler shortly, "for you have keener sight than I have. When I have passed you, take the paddle and cast off the painter. But first, just sling that rifle over your shoulder. I will do the same."

Suiting the action to the word, he and his companion were soon in position, each with a paddle in his hand. Then the painter was cast off, and at once the tiny craft shot from beneath the trees and out into the river.

"The tide is still on the ebb, so we will keep in near the trees," called Tyler gently, as they swept away from the bank. "By doing so we shall have less difficulty in making good progress, for the current will be less swift. A glance overhead will always tell you whether we are keeping the right course, and as you will be the first to notice when we go astray, just call to me so that I may know it. Now, in with the paddles."

Keeping time with one another, they sent the light boat up the stream at a good pace, and when an hour had gone had the satisfaction of knowing that they had made excellent progress, while half an hour, perhaps, of darkness remained to them. And now their course was shaped for the bank, for they did not dare to run the risk of being observed. Very soon they came to a part where the trees grew close down to the water, and here they remained till the day dawned, clinging to the boughs so that the stream should not carry them down again.

"It is light enough to see now," said Tyler at length, "and we will push in and take up a position from which we shall be able to see without being observed by people who may be passing on the river. Lift the boughs gently, Li, and pull us in. That's the way. Now we are in open water again, though it is only a narrow stretch, and can use our paddles."

Gently propelling the craft, they sent her on beneath the low-hanging boughs, and finally came to a halt when they had traversed about half a mile of the leafy avenue. And here they made fast with the painter and at once began to eat, for there was no saying when they would have another opportunity. Then they turned their faces to the river and peered from amongst the covering, being able to see right across the river.

"We have a long row before us, and have need of all our strength," said Tyler, "and for that reason we will take it in turns to rest, for this night-work is very tiring. You lie down, Li Sung, and I will wake you later on."

And so, whilst one kept watch on the river, noting the boats which passed, the other slept, the following night finding them both refreshed and prepared for the work before them. Issuing from the trees they once more took to the stream, and when the following day was at hand were in the neighbourhood of Rembas, the lowest of the piratical strongholds.

"What is that?" demanded Tyler suddenly as they lay on their paddles, staring at the opposite bank, and wondering

whether or not they were opposite Rembas. "I heard a sound behind us, and I am sure that it did not come from the bank."

Both sat up and listened eagerly, only to turn to one another in perplexity, for neither could fathom the nature of the sound which had caused them alarm.

"It is a curious hissing," said Tyler in troubled tones, "and as I said before, I am sure that it comes from the direction of the mouth of the river. But what can it be? To me it sounds like water."

"Perhaps it am de tide, de sea making into de river," suddenly suggested the Chinaman in tones of alarm. "If so, we better row, massa, for de bore am terrible, and would fill dis boat to de top. Yes, Li have listened, and he not like de sound. Row, massa, or we be drowned."

That Li Sung was alarmed there could be no doubt, for he had spent some time on the river in the service of the men of Paddi, and he well knew of the danger of the bore caused by the tide as it swept into the upper reaches. Indeed, at any other time he would have thought of the matter and would have warned his young master; but the fact that they were on a spying expedition, and that all their energies were devoted to keeping watch for the enemy, had caused him to forget it. Now, however, as the sound swept with great rapidity towards them, he recognized the meaning of that ominous hissing, and, turning swiftly to Tyler, urged him to row for his life. Plunging paddles into the water the two strained at their work, in the desperate attempt to reach the bank before the tide overwhelmed them. But they were too late to escape, and hardly had they gained more than twenty yards when the full strength of the bore rushed upon them. In the gathering light each saw a moving wall of water, some five feet in height, rushing towards them, and though at a shout from Tyler the bows of the craft were swept round to meet it, in the hope of riding over it, the oncoming water seized them in its powerful grasp, swung the boat round as if it

had been a top, and then washed clean over it, upsetting it and turning it bottom upwards. As for the two occupants, they were torn from their seats, and carried on with the flood for some feet. A minute later they appeared upon the surface, swimming for their lives.

"Make for the boat," shouted Tyler, striking out in that direction. "The bore has passed now, and the water is smooth; but the tide runs strong, and we must have support."

Without wasting further breath he swam lustily in the direction of the overturned boat, and very soon reached it. In an instant he had slipped the bag of ammunition from his shoulders, and had placed it on the flat bottom of the craft. The rifle followed, and then, conscious that he was now free to help, he turned to see how Li Sung was faring.

"He is drowning," he suddenly gasped, catching sight of the unfortunate Chinaman struggling in the water feebly, with head almost submerged, and a look of terror and despair on his face. "Hold on a little! Stick to it, Li, and I will be with you."

Without hesitation he relinquished his grasp of the upturned boat and struck out for the Chinaman. A moment or two and he was beside him, when he at once clasped him by the shoulders, and, putting out all his strength, turned the unfortunate man upon his back.

"Lie still and I will tow you to the boat," he shouted in his ear. "The rifle and ammunition are evidently too much for you. That's it. There is nothing to fear, and you will soon be safe."

Fortunately for our hero, Li Sung, though near to the point of sinking, had still retained consciousness, and as soon as he heard Tyler's voice, lay perfectly still on his back, not daring to struggle lest he should ruin his own chances as well as his master's. A moment later he felt himself being gently towed through the water, and at once instinct told him that he could help by kicking out with his legs.

"That's the way," sang out Tyler encouragingly, though in

breathless tones. "Stick to the job and we shall be there very soon. Now, one moment while I turn you over, and there you are."

The whole incident had happened so quickly that when the two found themselves clinging to the boat, and staring at one another in the gathering light of another day, they could scarcely realize how they came to be there, nor the fact that the bore had caught them in its terrible embrace and had overwhelmed them. For several minutes they retained their hold, while they looked about them with anxious eyes and panted to regain their breath.

"A narrow shave," said Tyler at last, "and we are lucky not to be at the bottom of the river. But we cannot stay here, for the day has come, and we shall be seen. Come, rouse yourself, Li, and let us get to the bank There should be no difficulty, for the tide is sweeping us there."

"One little bit and Li be ready," was the answer, as the Chinaman gasped for breath. "Dis boy not be alivee at allee if massa not dere. Li say dat you save him, and he tank you. Now me ready. Which way, massa?"

"The shortest road, and the quicker we are there the better, for I think that I see a collection of huts on the opposite bank, and it may be Rembas. Come, let me take your bag of ammunition and your rifle. Fortunately this boat has a flat floor, and the things will stay on top without difficulty. There, you are ready now, and so put all your strength into it."

Thanks to the rest which they had had, and to the fact that they were so quickly able to relieve themselves of the weight of the rifle and bag which had weighed them down, the two were able to strike out lustily for the bank which was on their right, and, aided by the tide, were soon within easy distance of it. By now, too, the light had increased, so much so that they could see that the object to which Tyler had drawn attention was indeed Rembas, the home of a horde of pirates, and at once fear lent power to their limbs, and they sent the overturned boat rapidly on her way.

"Kick with all your might," shouted Tyler, glancing uneasily over his shoulder. "If we can get to the trees within the next few minutes we may escape the eyes of the people over there, for the day has only just dawned. Send her along, for I tell you that our lives depend upon our exertions."

That the Chinaman understood was evidenced by the manner in which he lent his aid to the task, and so lustily did the two thrust at the boat that very little time had elapsed before they had disappeared beneath the boughs which overgrew the water, and were standing upon the bottom.

"Drag her to the shore and turn her up," said Tyler quickly. "Now, lift the ammunition-bags and the guns, and over she goes. That's the way, and now we are ready in case we have been seen."

"Massa can knowee for sure dat dat am de case," cried Li Sung, with a shake of the head. "As we kick and push along Li turn him head and see men over deir, and him velly certain dat dey see him. P'r'aps dey tink dat it am fishermen only, but den dey not catched by de bore. Dey talk it over while dey eat de morning rice, and den some of de young men comee dis way to lookee what havee happened."

"In which case we shall be discovered," said Tyler curtly. "Then we will make a fight of it. I am inclined to think like you, Li, and believe that in spite of our exertions we shall be followed. Curiosity will get the better of those people, and they will cross the river to see who it was who was swamped by the tide. We cannot possibly meet them as friends, for that was to be our last resource, and just now, with my disguise in this condition, I should certainly be discovered. So we shall have to keep them at a distance, and that being the prospect before us, I vote that we at once search for a spot suited to our needs. What about that rock over there?"

He pointed along the avenue formed by the overhanging boughs to an open patch, into the centre of which a steep rock jutted.

"It seems at this distance to be suitable," he went on, "for it has some bushes on it to form a covering, and it is not overgrown by trees. We should be able to get shelter by piling up a few boulders, and, while hidden ourselves, could tell the instant an enemy attempted to approach us."

"Den let us go, massa," cried Li, "for me see dat a boat have put out from Rembas, and velly soon de pirates be here."

Stepping into the boat they grasped the paddles and had very soon reached the edge of the trees. And here Tyler sprang ashore and dived into the jungle, for to have taken the boat out into the open would have been madness, as she would at once have stood out against the bank and have been seen by those in the boat which had just shot from the opposite shore.

"It will do well," cried Tyler in tones of delight as he reached the back of the rock and closely inspected its surface. "I reckon it to be at least a hundred feet in height, and at the back it is almost as smooth as glass, while it is far too steep to be climbed, even by the most active of natives. Then, as I remarked before, the trees seem to have fought shy of this spot, probably because the ground about is rocky, and so there is a wide clearing all round. Yes, it will be a refuge, and if the worst comes to the worst we can hold it against the enemy. Now for the boat."

Running back to his companion he beckoned to him to bring the craft close in, and then hastily issued his orders, for he realized that there was no time to be lost if they wished to take up their position on the rock.

"We will run her up and then carry her as near to the rock as possible," he said. "By turning well away from the water we shall be able to reach a point from which we can move into the open without being seen, and there we can leave the boat if we wish, for she will be under our rifle-fire."

"But at night de pirates burn her or carry her off, and den what will Li and massa do?" demanded the Chinaman. "Dere am no great weight here, and de two of us carry him easily."

"Very well, then, we will carry her as she is right up to the rock. When she is there we can hide her amongst the bushes, and can carry up what provisions are left, though I fear that the majority of our supply has been washed away. But we shall see, and if we are pressed for food we can make a line with the help of a creeper, and a hook from one of the forest thorns, and do our best to catch a few fish. Now, up with her and let us trot."

Grasping either end of the river-boat they lifted it upon their shoulders and went into the jungle at a run. Then, as soon as they had arrived at the point from which they were no longer visible to those on the river, for the rock rose up between them and it, they boldly crossed the open space and deposited their burden in a thick bush at the base. A rapid search discovered a bag of provisions which had escaped the bore owing to the fact that it had become jammed in the bows, and with this, their muskets, and bags of ammunition, they commenced to scale that face of the rock which looked out to the river, and which was so broken and irregular that it gave ample facilities for climbing.

"Creep on all-fours and keep as low as you can," said Tyler in low tones, casting a glance towards the boat which was being rowed in their direction. "By that means we may escape discovery, and we shall be able to entrench ourselves. Of course I know that those fellows will track us, but if we are careful they will not know exactly where we are, and when the time comes for fighting we shall have the advantage of taking them by surprise. Ah, here is a likely spot! It is high up, gives us a wide flat space upon which to lie, and has an ample covering of bushes. Give a hand here, Li, while I pile up a few of these boulders."

Placing their burdens upon the ground, and still taking the precaution to creep on hands and knees, they quickly arranged a number of boulders into a semicircle, piling them one on the other till they formed a wall which would give protection against rifle-fire, but through which the defenders could keep

watch upon the enemy and return their shots. Then they turned to their weapons and carefully inspected them.

"Two rifles and two revolvers," said Tyler, dragging the latter from beneath his coat."

"And a knife, massa," burst in Li Sung, displaying a formidable weapon which was thrust into the cloth which he wore about his waist.

"Then we ought to do well, Li. We will make an equal division, taking a gun and a revolver each. Now for the ammunition. How glad I am that the bags were waterproof! It was my captain's suggestion, and it may save our lives. We will open them and spread the contents in the sun. Then any dampness will be dried, and we shall have no fear of misfires."

It took little time to make all their preparations, and ere many minutes had passed all four weapons were loaded, and their muzzles were protruding from the face of the wall, having been thrust through the embrasures purposely left between the boulders. As for the defenders of this solitary position, they had taken their posts behind the wall, and lay there, with fingers upon their triggers and eyes glued upon the boat, which by now had approached so close to the bank that the occupants were easily visible.

"Ten of them in all, and a fierce set of fellows they look," said Tyler in the coolest of tones. "I see, too, that they have muskets with them, so we may expect a fusillade before long. But first let them find us and make up their minds that we are enemies and then the fun will begin."

"Dey make no doubt dat we not friends," exclaimed Li Sung with an emphatic wag of his head. "Dey knowee dat no man enter de river unless he belong to de pirate. And if he am a friend he come straight to dem. But we not dare to do dat, and when dey see dat we reach de shore, and not try to row over to Rembas when de boat am floating again, dey knowee for sure dat we enemies. Velly soon massa will hear de pop of de gun, and den we havee to fightee. Li Sing likee

dat velly well, for dese men am de same as dose who took him from him little wife and him child, and he hate dem."

"Then you will stand beside me to the last," said Tyler, turning upon him and staring into his eyes. "Remember that we cannot save our lives by giving in to these people, for they are the sort of men who do not understand mercy. So to submit to them would merely be to bring instant death. For that reason we will make a big fight of it, and let us recollect that to do that we must hold our fire till they are climbing the rock, and then make every bullet tell. We need not answer a shot from their guns till they are close upon us, for we are out of their range, and the bullets will not pass through this wall. Once they attempt to rush us, however, we will let them have a volley and drive them back."

"Yes, and Chinee boy makee de sling," cried Li Sung with a show of excitement which was strange to him. "You watchee, massa, and see what him do. When Li one little boy in China him killee de bird and beast wid stones from de sling, and he do de same for dese men. Lookee at dat."

For once the stolid nature of this son of the East broke down under the excitement of the moment, and his usually impassive and wooden face became wreathed with cunning smiles as he spoke to his master. Then, with dexterous fingers, and with a rapidity which was wonderful, he tore a strip from his strong cotton clothing, folded it into a long band, and at once began to select a suitable stone.

"Find plenty here," he said as he groped about, "and enough to last velly fine time. Massa watch dat tree over dere. Li hit him just above de water."

Pointing to a durian which grew on the bank of the river, with its trunk emerging from the water, he placed a stone in his improvised sling, and raising himself till his figure almost showed above the wall and the surrounding bushes, he sent the missile hurtling at his target. Thud! Even at that distance the sound of its blow could be heard, while a splash immediately following told that it had fallen into the river.

"Pirate not likee dat," he said with a smile of pleasure on his face. "Stone hittee velly hard."

"And these boulders still harder," chimed in Tyler, delighted at the thought that they had at their feet a means by which they might husband their ammunition and yet exchange blows with the enemy should the latter see fit to attack them. "If they try to climb up here I will give them a few boulders while you tickle them with the sling. But, steady, Li, for they are now close at hand. Evidently they mean to look into the matter thoroughly, for they are making for the spot where we entered beneath the boughs. Then they will follow us up, and will soon come across us here. Keep out of sight whatever you do."

Breathless with excitement, the two upon the rock watched the ten pirates by means of the embrasures in their hastily-built wall, and losing sight of them for some few minutes as they disappeared beneath the trees, soon saw them again as they too came to the part where the jungle ceased, and the open space intervened between it and the rock.

"Sending men into the forest on our tracks," said Tyler calmly. "Get your sling ready, but remember, not a shot till I give the word."

With fast-beating hearts the two awaited the reappearance of the men, and very soon they were seen running towards the rock. At the same time those who had remained in the boat paddled forward till they were opposite their hidden enemies. Then for some few minutes the two parties shouted to one another, for they were uncertain how to act. However, remembering that two alone had been seen in the boat which had been overturned by the bore, and that they were ten in number, the pirates decided to probe the mystery to the bottom, and those in the boat having landed, all came towards the rock with the evident intention of scaling it and capturing the fugitives.

CHAPTER XVI

Hemmed in

"WAIT while I call to these fools and order them to come to us," cried one of the enemy, as he and his comrades walked at a leisurely rate towards the rock near the summit of which Tyler and Li Sung were in hiding. "They are probably merely Dyak fishermen who have been washed into the river and swamped, and why should we take the trouble to climb for them. Let them come down to us."

"But supposing they are spies?" demanded another. "We know that those at Sarawak, under the tuan besar (great chief—James Brooke), are about to attack us, and no doubt they will send some here to see what preparations we are making; not that we need trouble ourselves, for they will certainly be beaten. Still, of what use is it to call men who are spies, for will they descend and come to us like children when they know that within a minute they will be kneeling before us with their hands lashed, while one of our number stands above them with his sword and prepares to sever their necks? Call if you wish, but you waste your breath."

"That we will see," was the answer, "but if there be no answer you shall be the first to climb, for I as the leader give you the order. Now, cease chattering while I shout."

Stepping to a large boulder which lay near at hand he leapt upon it, and, placing a hand to his mouth, shouted at the top of his voice, telling those who might be hidden above to come down at once.

"It is useless for you to remain," he said, "for we are ten while you are but two, and also there are hundreds to

follow us. Come then quietly, for the end will be the same whatever you do. You are caught, and we claim you as our prisoners."

"Let him claim and shout as much as he likes," said Tyler, with a reckless laugh, as Li Sung whispered the message in his ear, "I don't care to hand myself over; for the idea of cold steel and a severed neck is not enticing. We will just lie perfectly still till we are obliged to make a move, and then let our action be swift. See here, Li. I will raise this big boulder upon the wall just where this bush covers the front. Then, when one of the attackers happens to cross the line it will follow, I will heave it over and step back at once. You can pick one of them off with the sling with the same smartness, and perhaps they will fail to discover our exact position. Look out! That fellow is shouting again."

Once more did the leader of the little band of pirates spring upon the boulder, the better to observe the rock, and shout a message at those who he was sure were in hiding there. Then, hearing no answer, he and his men put their heads together and once more discussed the matter.

"We waste time," at last said their leader. "Finding that the dogs will not come to us, which perhaps is not to be wondered at, seeing that they have nothing to gain, but their heads and their lives to lose, we will go to them, and afterwards reward ourselves at the expense of their convenience and comfort. Come, Penchu, yours is the post in advance. Show us the way."

For a moment it looked as though the dusky Malay who had at first proposed that the rock be searched would decline the honour thus thrust upon him, for he glanced above him, and then doubtfully at the bushes which grew in all directions, wondering which of them hid the enemy. But his comrades were there to aid him, and, besides, there were only two above, and they were undoubtedly half-drowned by their upset in the river. With a scowl at his leader, and a second glance above, he suddenly made up his mind, and drawing a kriss of large

size from his belt, gripped it between his teeth and turned to the rock.

"Follow me," he shouted, removing the weapon as he did so, "and this kriss to the man who can be before me in the race to the top. Mind, this weapon, which I had from my father, goes to the man who can reach these dogs and slay them in spite of my efforts. Now, I am about to make the attempt."

He waited a moment to give his comrades time to take up the challenge and to draw their own weapons. Then he sprang at the obstacle before him, and, using both hands and feet, came clambering up at a rapid rate. Beside and behind him rushed his comrades, all eager to be first in the race, for the prospect of winning a kriss had the greatest attraction for them, while there was always the hope that one particular man would have the honour of slaying those who were in hiding.

"Wait for the word," said Tyler, with difficulty restraining his excitement. "The time has not yet come, but will be here very soon. Are you ready? Then watch me, and as I lift the boulder take aim with the sling."

It was hard work to lie there behind that wall and watch with calmness as ten fierce Malay pirates climbed to the assault, and more than once was Tyler tempted to give full play to his impetuosity and spirit, and commence the battle by flinging his boulder down the rock. But as yet the distance was so great that he might well have missed his aim, and for that reason he still remained in a crouching attitude, his hands clasping the boulder, and his eyes fixed upon the figures below.

"Time's up!" he said quietly, when he judged that they were near enough. "Ready? Then fire!"

Putting out all his strength he shouldered the piece of rock and rose from behind the bush. A swift glance told him that three of the enemy were directly beneath him, and in an instant, and without a trace of hesitation, he launched the

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"HE LAUNCHED THE MISSILE AT THEM"

missile at them, watching as it fell to learn what success he had. Crash! The boulder with ever-increasing pace fell upon a moss-clad spot some twenty feet above the pirates, causing them to raise their eyes in that direction and come to a sudden halt. Then, leaping as if it were alive, it cannoned from the place, and, twirling with frightful rapidity, flew into their midst, sending all three rolling to the bank below, where they lay stunned or killed by the impact. As for Li Sung, stealthily leaning over the barrier he selected the leading man, the one who had been given the post of honour, and, flourishing the sling about his head, suddenly let the stone free. Ah! more sudden than the boulder which had disposed of three of the attackers the sling sent the stone swiftly to the mark, and ere the Malay could cry out in dismay, or lift a hand to ward off the blow, it struck him full upon the forehead, causing him to toss his arm above his head and then roll to the foot of the rock a helpless and lifeless object.

"That will teach them caution," said Tyler, sinking down into his old position and at once beginning to place another boulder upon the edge of the wall, "and I believe that none of them saw where the shots came from. We will play the same game again, though they will certainly discover us next time, for they will keep their eyes turned to the upper part of the rock, and will not do as they did before, and rush headlong and with their gaze bent upon the path immediately at their feet. Ah, they are having a talk, and do not seem to like the affair!"

Peering through one of the embrasures he could obtain an uninterrupted view of the bank of the river and of the surroundings of the rock, and watched eagerly as the surviving natives, filled with alarm at the sudden misfortune which had fallen upon their comrades, turned as if with common consent and went rolling and scrambling down to the ground below, each eager to get to a place of safety. Then they gathered together at the edge of the water, and for a little time it looked as though they would take to their boat and fly to the opposite

shore. But their leader restrained them, and at his orders they returned, and began to walk cautiously towards the foot of the rock.

"We were scared by the suddenness of it all," said the man who was in command, a long, lanky Malay of forbidding appearance, who carried a kriss of unusual dimensions. "But we can never think of retiring; for recollect, my brothers, we are in better case than they, for they are but two, and are probably barely able to stand after their upset in the river and their struggle to reach land. Take heart, then, and first, before renewing the attack, let us take a look at our comrades who have fallen. For myself, I scarcely know how it is that they came to their end, for I was climbing with hands and feet, and with my eyes engaged in picking out the best path by which to reach the top. Then there was the thud of the boulder falling, and when I looked, three of our good friends were falling, while Penchu, who led us, had sprung into the air for all the world like a beast which had just been struck with an arrow. Come, let us move forward, for our comrades at Rembas would laugh us to shame were we to return and tell them that we had been driven off by two half-drowned Dyaks."

Flashing his kriss in the sun he led the way to the fallen pirates, and turned each one on his back.

"Dead!" he said as he looked at them. "Comrades, their end was swift and sure, as may ours be when the time comes. Now for Penchu. Ah, see! he was struck by a stone thrown with great force, for his forehead is driven in and the skull cracked. Then all the better for us, I say, for this proves that our birds up there are unarmed."

"Which is just what one could expect, my brother," cried one of the number crowding about him. "Men who are caught in the bore are lucky indeed if they escape with their lives at all, while to do so they would certainly have to discard their weapons. We have them safely, and I propose that we make the attack again."

"For what reason should we run the risk of having our bodies crushed with another boulder?" demanded another swiftly. "They are above us, that we know, though where they are hidden is another matter. Very well, they will have seen long ere this that resistance is useless, and that to prolong the fighting and kill more of our party will only lead to suffering on their part. Let that be pointed out to them, and I warrant that they will come down to us gladly and submit quietly to what is bound to follow even as surely as the night comes after the day."

"A grand suggestion, and one which we will put in practice," exclaimed the leader, snatching at the chance of avoiding further danger. "Stand quiet, all of you, and listen as I shout to them. Above there!"

Once more he placed his hands to his mouth, so as to make the sounds carry farther, and called to those in hiding. But there was no answer, though he repeated the words on four occasions.

"Then I will say what I have to say to the rock, well knowing that they will hear," he cried, seeing that his call had been ignored. "Above there! You who are in hiding on the rock, and who have killed four of my men, I give you warning that we will kill you, as you deserve, if you resist us again. For the loss which you have caused your lives are forfeit, and I call upon you to come down to us and suffer the penalty. Failing that we will drag you down by the neck, and then you shall learn what it is to lose a life with difficulty. Come, we wish you no worse than those others whom we have captured on former occasions. Come down and let the matter be ended."

It was strange to hear his quaint suggestion, and at another time Tyler would have been amused at the naïveness of it. But danger threatened now, and life was at stake. As Li Sung interpreted the message, word for word, a feeling almost of fear assailed our hero, and his heart sank at the prospect of early death. Then, remembering that he and his companion were as yet unseen, and that they might still do as well as

formerly, his spirits rose, and he turned to the Chinaman with a smile upon his face.

"We will lie like mice and make no move. At least that is what I say. For you, Li Sung, you may issue from our hiding-place if you wish, and descend. For myself, the idea of being beheaded is sufficient to make me fight like a tiger and until I am killed."

"And for me, too, massa. De Chinee boy been wid de Malays, and he know dat dey not tink de same of life. A man am happy in dis world, but when him dead he happier still, so dey say. And when de time come for choppee de head, dey kneel wid a laugh on dem lips, and dey die easy. Chinamen am de same, but Li velly different. He not likee to lose de life, for he havee little wife and child in Singapore."

"Then we will stay quietly here and await events. Those fellows will scarcely dare to return to Rembas and tell their comrades that they have been defeated by two men alone, and for that reason they will remain till they see that their case is hopeless. That will suit us well, for we can easily beat them off, and if only we can defer the arrival of reinforcements till night has fallen, we shall have a better chance of escape. But what are they doing?"

Thrusting his head as close to the boulders as was possible, he peered through the narrow opening and watched the party of pirates with interest. As for the latter, the fact that their extraordinary demand had met with no reply, and that silence alone had followed, filled them with astonishment; for these Malays, with their comrades of the Dyak race who had thrown in their lot with the men of the sea in place of tilling the soil as did so many of their people, had a peculiar code of their own, and held life in such little esteem that, as in China, it was almost possible to buy a reprieve for one about to die by paying for a substitute. Fate was fate to them, and when all was lost, when sickness came, and when capture seemed imminent, it was a simple and an easy way to step forward to

meet the inevitable, and to pass from the world with as little trouble as possible. Then was this not a desperate case? Could those above who were hidden on the rock hope to escape? Absurd! They were cornered, and sooner or later, and in any case within an hour or two, they would be captives, and their fate would be upon them. Then why go to the labour of putting it off? Why not come down and end the matter, so that these men might return to the opposite shore and prepare to meet the foreigners who were about to enter the river? Extraordinary though the idea was, it was in keeping with the upbringing of the Malays and the Dyaks, for they, like the Chinese, thought nothing of death, and met their end for the most part with a smile upon their faces. However, on this occasion the pirates had foes to deal with of a different stamp, and finding that no answer came to their warning, they collected together again to discuss the situation.

"The day advances, and soon the noonday heat will be upon us," said their leader in tones of vexation. "Let us put an end to this matter at once, and then return to Rembas. It is plain to all that the dogs who killed our friend will keep to their lair till we hunt them out, and that being the case, we will rush to the attack again. Keep your eyes open and fixed well above you. Your hands and feet will be sufficient to allow you to choose a good path."

He turned to look each of his men in the face, and then, seeing that none of them held back, he did as his dead comrade had done when leading the first charge, and having placed his kriss between his teeth came at the rock at a fast run, hoping to scale it rapidly.

"Steady!" whispered Tyler, seeing that Li Sung had swung his sling about his shoulder. "Wait till they are upon us as before, and then let them have your stone. In any case we must try to avoid a shot, for the sounds would at once attract others from over the water."

"Makee noise not matter," exclaimed Li Sung with a shake of his head. "De men of Rembas know dat dere am fighting,

and dey sending oders to see. Velly soon Li and Massa havee de bullets about dem."

As he spoke he pointed eagerly over the top of the wall to the river beyond, and a glance in that direction caused Tyler to give vent to an exclamation of dismay.

"Three more sampans," he cried in accents of alarm. "And all filled with men. That will add thirty at least to the attacking force, and will increase our difficulties immensely."

For the instant the same feeling of consternation as had assailed him before came suddenly upon him; and then, as he took in the situation, and realized the strength of the position which he and the Chinaman held, his face brightened, and he turned to look at the seven remaining men below with spirits as high as ever they were before.

"Of course we are cornered," he said to himself, "and we are in a desperately tight place. But others have managed to do well under similar circumstances, and we shall do the same. After all, I think that we have much to be thankful for, for we might well have been drowned in the river, and then again, what luck to have struck upon such a spot as this! Why, fifty shall not turn us out, for after our escape from the bore I do not mean to be easily beaten. Ah, here comes the leader! and, foolishly for himself, he has chosen a line which I can reach. In a minute he will be hurled to the bottom of the rock."

With courage renewed by his reflections, Tyler stared at the pirates, and watched as they slowly clambered up the steep face of the rock. Unlike the occasion which had preceded this attack, he was as cool and as collected as if he were on the *Dido* eating his dinner amongst his messmates, and at once checked the Chinaman's eagerness to deliver a shot.

"Wait," said Tyler shortly. "When the boulder goes you can fire, but till then remain behind the wall."

Panting with their exertions, and led by the man who had first rushed to the assault, the seven pirates came clambering up the rock, their eyes searching every likely spot above,

while they wondered which of them would be the one to sight the fugitives. Then, as they neared the summit without a sign of their presence having been come upon, and without a stone or boulder having been thrown, they began to doubt that they were still there, and halted to stare at one another questioningly.

"Are the birds flown then?" demanded their leader, sitting down to rest. "Fools that we were, not to have set a watch upon the back of this rock, for while we have talked they have slipped away."

"Not so," shouted one of his men. "I myself strolled in that direction, and I tell you that no living man could descend the rock on the farther side unless possessed of a long rope. They are here, above us, and we shall come upon them crouching in the bushes and whining for their lives."

"Then forward!" cried the leader. "Let us make an end of them, but remember, they are not to die here. For the trouble which they have given us in thus climbing, for the loss of our friends, we must demand of them a price, and they shall pay it. Before they take their last breath they shall be sad at the thought that they did not fall in with our wishes when first we called to them. But let us not delay. Follow me!"

This time with kriss in hand he came clambering up the steep slope, with eyes watching eagerly for some movement to tell him of the presence of the fugitives. But there was not so much as the tremble of a leaf, while not a sound broke the silence. A minute passed, and just as the Malay was about to call for a second halt, convinced that the birds were flown, a figure suddenly erected itself before him, and, half-hidden by an enormous bush, reared a boulder on high. Ah! The Chinaman took aim at his man with the utmost calmness, and then, ere the poor wretch could spring aside, or could shout in his terror, the mass of stone caught him on the breast and bore him backwards. A second and he was rolling and pitching on his way to the bottom, and even while his comrades

were wondering how it had all happened, and were marvelling at the sight of the Chinaman, the unfortunate leader came with a thud on the bank of the river, and, rolling forward for all the world like a rabbit which had just been shot, came to a halt with face buried in the mud and limbs which were strangely contorted.

Once more it looked as though the attackers would lose heart and fly for their lives. But, emboldened by the thought that they had at length located the enemy, they suddenly plucked up their courage and, urged on by one of their number possessed of more spirit than his comrades, they came panting and struggling up the steep slope, determined to reach the lair of the Chinaman and wreak their vengeance upon him.

"A Chinaman!" shouted the one in advance. "We will swing him to the highest branch by means of his tail of hair, and we will spend the day and amuse ourselves by emptying our guns at his body. Fear him not, for he has boulders alone to hit us with, and those we can avoid by spreading out. Scatter at once, and be sure that none of you advance directly beneath the spot."

Acting upon this advice, and warned by the fate which had so suddenly and unexpectedly overtaken their leader, the surviving Malays at once separated till wide intervals lay between them, and then advanced upon the wall behind which Tyler and Li Sung were crouching, at a pace which promised to bring them to close quarters before many seconds had passed.

"One little moment," gasped Li Sung, peering at them over the barrier. "China boy soon stop de little game. He pick out de man who am in front, and he send him to join him brother. Watch de sling, massa."

With deft hand and unerring eye, which showed that he had spent many an hour in practising the use of his weapon, Li Sung stood erect and leant over the wall. Round swung the sling till it churned the air into a high-pitched whistle. Then, as the finger loosed one of the strings, the band fell limply upon his wrist and hand, while the stone which had

lain in the pouch flew down the side of the rock as if it had been fired from a gun, and, as in the former case, struck full upon the forehead of the Malay who had taken it upon himself to lead his comrades. Like an ox felled with the stroke of a pole-axe he collapsed upon the moss-grown path, and then, with nothing there to retain its position, the limp and lifeless body slid downwards, toppled over, and, gathering way as it went, rolled over and over till its further progress was arrested by the bank beneath.

"That should stop them," exclaimed Tyler as he watched the body fall, "and it was a capital shot, Li Sung. I watched him, and feel sure that the stone must have battered a hole in his skull. But wait. Will they go after all, or are they determined to come closer to us?"

Once again it was a doubtful point whether the Malays would retire on the death of their comrade, or whether they would push up the face of the rock and come to hand-grips with those whom they were attacking. Indeed, it wanted very little to cause their determination to waver and send them down to the bank, or to infuse fresh courage into their hearts and cause them to dash headlong at their enemies. They paused, looked doubtfully at one another, and then turned to watch the body of the man who had gone to the bank below. Then one of them happened to cast a glance across the river, as if to measure the distance in case he wished to make good his escape. Instantly his eye fell upon the three sampans which were being rowed across, and realizing that they must contain companions and brothers-in-arms who were coming to help, he shouted a few words to his comrades.

"They will jeer at us," he cried, attracting the attention of all to the approaching boats. "When they learn that there are only two on this rock, and that we have failed to take them, they will bid us return to Rembas and mind the children and the flocks! We must capture and kill these beggarly Chinamen. Who will follow me?"

For a moment he turned to stare at his brothers, and then,

with flashing kriss in his hand, and eyes fixed upon the low wall with its covering of bush, he came clambering up towards it, ready to leap the obstacle as soon as he was near enough, and slaughter those who lay behind. As for the others, stung to the quick by the thought that their companions of Rembas would jeer and laugh at them, they turned with desperation to renew the assault, determined to die there rather than be dishonoured.

"We need not fear them greatly," said Tyler quietly, as he watched them ascending, "for the rock is very steep, and we are placed at a great advantage. Remember that we may have to fight hard for our lives later on, and for that reason deal gently with the ammunition. I shall make use of these boulders as long as possible."

Standing behind the barricade each selected a missile, Li Sung twirling his sling aloft and sending stone after stone at the Malays, while Tyler rolled huge boulders down upon them. But the pirates had learnt their lesson, and as they came they took advantage of every bit of available cover. Each hollow and nook held an enemy, crouching out of range of the stones and boulders, and with eye following every movement of the defenders. Waiting till they had need to select another missile, the figure would spring from the patch of cover and dart to another favourable spot higher up. And thus, with the cunning and stealth of an Indian, they came closer and closer to the barrier, till it wanted only a short rush to come up with it.

"Revolvers and rifles!" said Tyler, seeing that stones were of little avail. "We shall be able to pick them off, and you will see how quickly they will scamper to the bottom. Look! there is the man who called to them to encourage them! He is watching you with the sling, and when you have let the stone go he will make a rush. Now, I have covered him with the revolver, so you can fire."

Grasping his master's meaning immediately, Li Sung slung the missile at the Malay, and then snatched at the second

revolver. As he did so the pirate leapt to his feet, and judging that he was now sufficiently near to reach the wall, and would be upon the enemy before another stone could be fitted, he came directly up the slope, discarding the boulders and rocks which lay there, and which would have afforded him cover. Snap! The report of Tyler's weapon set the echoes ringing, while the heavy bullet which his revolver carried hit the man plump in the chest, bringing him to an abrupt halt. There was a shout and a shriek as the pirate felt the blow, and then, summoning all his remaining power, he swung his kriss back over his shoulder, and taking rapid aim at the Chinaman above, sent the keen blade of steel hissing towards him. Next moment he had tumbled back upon the ground, where, clutching madly at moss and bush, he slowly slid to the bottom. As for Tyler, he had expected the man to fall dead at once, and started back as the kriss flew in his direction. But it was hopeless to expect to escape it, and ere he had time to dodge to either side the point of the blade struck upon his fore-arm, and, pressed onward by the weight of the metal, perforated the limb.

"First blood to the enemy," said Tyler quietly. "A flea-bite which will do me no harm, but which will teach me to keep an eye upon their weapons. It was quickly done, and proved an excellent shot, made under the most unfavourable circumstances."

"It am a velly lucky escape, massa," cried Li Sung, darting to Tyler's side and removing the kriss. "Li havee seen one fine man hit in de body, and de blade go right through him, so dat he fallee dead. Massa one velly quick, and if him not move one little piecee him dead too. Wait there while China boy ties up de arm. Nothing to fear from de pirate."

Tearing a shred of linen from his coat, Li Sung rapidly applied it as a bandage to the arm, thereby arresting the flow of blood, which threatened to be free. Then he pointed triumphantly to the bank below, where the remaining Malays were gathered.

"Dey velly angry," he said with a little snigger, the nearest approach to a laugh which this son of the East would indulge in. "Dey not knowee what dey do, and dey fear deir friends and what dey say. Velly soon Li and de massa have to fight plenty hard."

The prospect of hard knocks and a desperate encounter seemed to please Li Sung, for he beamed upon Tyler as though this was the happiest day in his life. "Li havee been in nasty place before dis wid de massa, and he knowee dat allee turn out right. Massa Tyler bring him allee de way through de jungle, he lead Chinee boy and de Dyaks to Paddi, and den to Sarawak with de prahus. But dat am not allee. Him save Li when de water nearly cover him, and now him lies beside him servant and helps him to make de Malays run."

"Then you think that we shall be hotly engaged before very long," said Tyler, staring down at the pirates below. "It seems to me that we are cornered, and that we shall be lucky if either of us see the *Dido* and Sarawak again. Not that we are going to be beaten easily, for we have a splendid position, and will make the most of it. During the day we can beat our enemies off, but at nighttime it will be a different matter. Then they will creep to the top like so many snakes, and before we can deal with them they will rush upon us. We shall have to go once the darkness falls, and it becomes a question as to how the retreat is to be carried out."

"Plenty easy to creep down de rock in de dark till near de bottom," said Li Sung thoughtfully. "De Malays climb up de hill, and we go down. Dey not knowee, and we not knowee. Dey rush to dis wall with deir krisses in deir hands, and massa and him servant slip away in de dark into de jungle. Who am to stop dem?"

"A splendid idea, and one which we will follow," exclaimed Tyler with enthusiasm. "The matter had troubled me very much, and I was wondering what we could do, for I am sure that to remain here once night has come will be to lose our lives. But this is a plan which will meet the case. They will

crawl here in the hope of falling suddenly upon us, and we will slip down. If we meet, all the worse for our plan, though I fancy that in the confusion we could make good our escape. If not, we gain our object, and they reach this lair to find the birds gone. Pick up your rifle, Li, and let us teach the rogues that it is death to come close to the rock."

Determined to keep the enemy as far away as possible till evening fell, Tyler and his companion disposed themselves upon the ground, and with their weapons resting upon the piled-up boulders took steady aim at the pirates. As the three boats arrived, and were drawn up on the bank, they sent two bullets amongst the assembled natives, with the result that a couple tumbled on their faces, while the remainder separated with cries of indignation and surprise. But they were not permitted to enjoy more than a moment's peace, for very shortly another shot rang out in the still air, and a huge Malay, who seemed to occupy the post of chief, and about whom the men had been gathered, gave vent to a shriek, and, plunging forward on the edge of the river-bank, went splashing headlong into the water.

"A long shot, but I gave a little elevation, and aimed for the centre of his shoulders," said Tyler to himself. "That will give us breathing-space. Now, Li, I am hungry, and, as we always say in England that a man fights better when he has had some food, we will open that bag and see what there is to eat. We can keep a watch upon those fellows as we have our meal, and can plant a shot amongst them whenever necessary."

It was wonderful to see the calm manner in which the two sat down to their meal, the Chinaman contenting himself with some rice which they had had the forethought to have boiled before setting out on their expedition, and Tyler directing his attention to some biscuit and meat, which formed part of their store. Of water they had none, but that mattered very little at the moment, for they had been chilled by their upset in the river, and, though hot, the sun had done little more

than warm them, without inducing thirst. But the lack of something with which to moisten their lips made retreat from the rock all the more essential, and as they ate they discussed the matter eagerly.

"It is our only chance," said Tyler thoughtfully. "To remain here till to-morrow will mean certain ruin, for we should be parched with thirst, and then again, our ammunition will not last long enough. That is why I have suggested keeping the enemy at bay now, and making good use of our weapons. But there is a point which we have not considered. Once we are down below, which direction are we to take? Are we to steal one of their boats or make into the jungle?"

"The last, massa," said Li Sung. "Den, later on, we steal down upon de bank, and we take one of de sampan and sail for Sarawak."

"And what about our orders?" demanded Tyler with some warmth. "After coming all this way, and being almost drowned in the river, I am not going back with my tail between my legs and with no information to give. Not a bit of it. I shall stay near Rembas and do my best to spy upon them. Then, if you like, I will drop down to the mouth of the river and wait there for the expedition to arrive."

"Massa am de chief, and he say what we do," said Li Sung, with a shrug of his ungainly shoulders and a look of resignation. "If him say dat we go and be killed, Li havee to obey. But me not likee dis stay in de river. Me plenty much afraid."

"Then you are a foolish fellow," exclaimed Tyler angrily, for he was determined not to be thwarted in his attempt to learn tidings of the pirates, and in what he considered a duty, for which he had had the great honour to be specially selected. "If you don't like to stay, go back by yourself, though I shall be sorry to lose you. I have firmly made up my mind that I remain in the neighbourhood till I have satisfied my curiosity. But watch those men below. Something seems to have upset them."

At once both stared eagerly over their barricade, and saw with some concern that the pirates had collected at such a distance that they could not suffer loss from the bullets of the defenders. And there, grouped about the one who was in command, they stared out into the river with their eyes fixed upon a tiny object which was approaching.

"A swift sampan, and one dat brings de orders and de news," said Li Sung with the assurance of one who was well acquainted with the facts. "De man who am chief in Rembas havee one of de long tubes through which de white man lookee wid de eye, and he see allee dat havee happened. He send to dem to say must take de Chinamen. Well, we see to dat when de time come."

"We shall have something to say, I have no doubt," agreed Tyler, "and we must not spare a man. It will be a case of rapid shooting and loading. Here, let us arrange the ammunition in a handy form, so that there will be no loss of time in sorting, and so that we can ram a charge in without delay. Now, what is their next move?"

By now the narrow sampan which they had seen flying across the river, propelled by a dozen lusty oarsmen, had reached the bank, and had deposited there a Malay of forbidding appearance. That he was a man of some consequence was evident, for they showed him every deference, and, after listening to a short harangue which he delivered, followed him with loud shouts towards the rock.

"He will lead them, and we shall have to fight," said Tyler with a calmness which astonished himself. "Fire quickly, Li, and see that you do not miss, for we want to show them that to approach the rock is dangerous. Then they will put off the real attack till darkness has fallen, and will aid us in our plan."

That strict orders had been received to capture the insolent foreigners who had dared to come into the river Sarebus, and who had suffered shipwreck there, was plainly to be seen, for now that they had a new leader the pirates ran towards the

rock with shouts of exultation, and, unmindful of the warning which they had already received, commenced to climb it in scattered knots and groups, evidently with the intention of approaching the wall from many quarters and so annihilating the defenders. But they had a couple of marksmen to contend with, for Tyler had had sufficient practice by now to make certain of his man, while the Chinaman's trained eye only required the steadiness which his young leader constantly urged upon him to enable him to hit the mark on every occasion.

"Not a shot to be thrown away, just remember that," exclaimed Tyler sternly as the pirates came running along the bank. "Pick out your man, follow him for a second, and then press the trigger gently."

Almost at once his own weapon snapped, and the man who ran just behind the leader doubled up and rolled in a heap.

"A little high," said Tyler calmly, "but otherwise straight enough. We will see what this will do."

Once more he brought the weapon to his shoulder, and was about to press the trigger, when the Malay at whom he aimed disappeared in a hollow and caused him to pick out another man. But Tyler was not so easily to be put off, and conscious that a blow at the leader would have far more effect than one at his followers, he watched till the big Malay again made his appearance. His rifle snapped instantly, and the pirate fell upon his face, where he lay without a move.

"A few more like that and they will run," shouted Tyler. "Pick off those in advance, so that their comrades may see them fall. That will make them afraid, and they will soon hang back and long for shelter."

That his advice was good there could be no doubt, for nothing is more demoralizing in such an engagement than for those who are attacking in the open, and advancing up a hill, to suddenly find the lifeless bodies of their comrades rushing past them, or to be swept away and carried to the ground below by the weight of one tumbling upon them. At once

the prospect of a similar fate cools their ardour, and if they be not filled with courage and determined upon victory they are apt to retire in disorder. And so, neglecting those who clambered in rear, Tyler and his companion fired as rapidly as possible on those who were in the forefront, sending man after man rolling to the bottom. Then, as the attackers clustered together on the hill-side, attracted unconsciously by the thought of mutual protection and aid, our hero suddenly relinquished his weapon, and, with a shout to Li Sung to do the same, began to toss boulders down upon the enemy. Nor did he have to continue long at the task, for very soon the pirates turned with shrill cries of dismay and went sliding to the bottom, where they took to their heels and did not stop till they had put a safe distance between themselves and the defenders.

"That will keep them quiet for a time, and if only they will remain inactive till the darkness falls we shall be safe. Come, help me to build up the wall again and gather a store of boulders."

Without taking the trouble to crouch, for they knew that the pirates had seen them, Tyler and his companion set about the work, and having accomplished it sat down to rest, waiting impatiently for the night to come when they would put their plan to the test and do their utmost to escape from a trap which might well prove disastrous.

CHAPTER XVII

Danger and Difficulty

TWICE in succession did the collection of Malays and Dyaks who composed the attacking force endeavour to overcome the gallant defenders of the steep rock beside the bank of the river Sarebus. And on each occasion the leader of the gang who had their quarters in Rembas sat at his leisure before his hut on the opposite side of the water, and with glass fixed to his eye watched the fighting with interest.

"They are curs," he cried at last, when the final attempt to reach the barricade above had been defeated, "and as a punishment I swear that no help shall come to these dogs of mine till they have these two strangers in their hands. Are they not two only, while my men number twenty times as many? Then they shall stay till all are killed or until they can bring me tidings of their success. But I will send them a message to the effect that if they allow the enemy to escape I shall vent my anger upon them. Yes, I will warn them that the attempt must be made, and will say that if it prove too much for them then they shall suffer."

With this resolution before him the leader of the Rembas pirates despatched a boat to the farther bank, and with it one of his chief men, with instructions to give his message and then return.

"You can say that no food or drink shall be sent till they have captured these men, and that it will be better for them to die on the side of the rock than to return here unsuccessful," said he, as the man set out to do his bidding. "It

is absurd to think that so many of my men are defied by a couple of natives from China!"

"A messenger," said Tyler, who caught sight of the sampan as it shot out into the stream. "Will it recall these men, or will it bring news that reinforcements are to come?"

"Not dat, massa," answered Li Sung with assurance, accompanying the remark with the customary shake of his head, as if to add emphasis to his words. "Dese pirates tink dey knowee how to fight, and de leader over deir say dat not a man comee to help till we taken. He tell dem to takee plenty care unless we slip away. Dat all he comee for."

"Then we shall have to be doubly cautious," said Tyler, "and I'm going to set myself to work to think out the matter, for escape we must. In an hour it will be dark, so that we can count upon that time in which to make up our minds, and I think that we are not likely to be disturbed. Unless, of course, the message which is coming to our attackers rouses them to fury, and they throw themselves upon us again. Now, how could we manage to get away?"

Throwing himself upon the ground he fixed his eyes upon the figures of the enemy beneath, and watched them half listlessly while he endeavoured to find a means whereby he and Li Sung could slip from their retreat and get safely away.

"It must be done," he kept murmuring to himself. "For to-day this has been the very best of havens, but to-morrow it will be untenable, for thirst will be our greatest enemy, and up here we have no means of satisfying it. So leave we must, at the risk of our lives. By Jove!"

"Massa keepee plenty quiet," cried Li Sung at this moment, suddenly pointing to the bank beneath. "De messenger havee come, and Li tink dat some little game be played. What for dey light de torches?"

He asked the question with a puzzled expression on his face, and pointed again with a long lean finger to some figures which

could be seen flitting about amongst the jungle. That they were the pirates was perfectly clear, though for what reason they ran hither and thither, while some of their number advanced with flaring bundles of some material in their arms, was a matter of some difficulty to determine.

"I have it!" exclaimed Tyler at last, having watched them carefully. "They find that we are prepared to make a fight of it, and as you have said, the message from the other side has made them determined to try again before the darkness falls. They know that we should shoot them down when they had gained the rock, and that we have boulders ready for them, so they have thought of another way of beating us. Some fellow amongst them has his wits about him, for he has pointed out to them that though there is a clear space round this rock, yet bushes crop out from one side almost to the edge of the jungle which surrounds us. Those same bushes are continuous with the ones by which the rock is clothed, and there are sufficient here to roast us. Do you follow now?"

"And de men over deir?" demanded Li Sung thoughtfully, after having maintained silence for more than a minute as he puzzled over the matter.

"They have been cutting and collecting reeds and long, dry grass. There is no difficulty about that, for beyond a day's rain we have had very hot weather of late, and everything is dry. They have made the grass and reeds into bundles, and you can see that they are running forward with them and are tossing them down in a line from the jungle. It will require very few indeed to reach the belt of dry bushes which joins those upon the rock, and then—"

Tyler did not finish the sentence, but began to reach for his rifle, and place a pile of ammunition close to his hand.

"We must stop them," he said sternly, "or else we shall be roasted and smoked like pigs. Get your weapon, Li, and let them know that we can reach them; for I tell you that if the bushes here are set alight this place will be impossible. The

flames will flare all round it, and there are sufficient leaves about to cause the densest of smoke, which would choke us."

That he had not overstated the case was abundantly clear to the wily Chinaman, and once the latter's cunning mind had grasped the meaning of the movement below, and he had become alive to the danger of the situation, he set about the defence of the rock with alacrity. Snatching at his rifle, he rested it upon a boulder, and peered amongst the stones, awaiting an opportunity for a shot. As for Tyler, his weapon spoke out almost instantly, and one of the dusky figures which was loaded with a bundle of reeds fell forward into the jungle, while those who were near at hand ran to a place of shelter with a howl of dismay.

"One," said Tyler quietly, replacing the charge. "I can see that those fellows are scared, and that they fear our guns. We have shown them that when we fire we hit the mark as a rule, and it will be disconcerting to them to discover that we have them still in range. However, I have little doubt that one of their number will pluck up courage before very long, and will make a dash forward. In that case we shall be unable to stop him."

For half an hour the pirates hidden below in the jungle, or watching the rock from a safe distance on the bank of the river, made no further movement. Then a flaring light suddenly appeared amongst the trees, attracting the attention of the defenders of the rock and occupying all their thoughts.

"Some fellow about to make a rush," thought Tyler. "Keep your eye on him, Li, and fire when you see him run. Ah, there he is moving, but only to one side! In a few moments he will make up his mind to risk it, and then there will be a rush, and we shall have to do as well as we can."

Twice or three times was the blazing mass moved to a different part of the jungle, on each occasion causing alarm to Tyler and his companion, and making them think that the

moment had arrived when the man who had charge of it would summon all his courage, and, determined to risk the bullets of the defenders, would dash out into the open, with the object of crossing the narrow space which stretched between the jungle and the straggling line of bushes which extended from the base of the rock. With rifles at their shoulders, and eyes glued to the sights, they watched, ready to pull the triggers the instant they sighted the man. Then of a sudden each gave vent to a startled cry, and, swinging round to the left, emptied their weapons at the retreating figure of a man who had run out from an entirely different point, and, safe in the thought that the attention of the defenders was occupied in another direction, had dashed at the bushes and flung a mass of blazing reeds upon them.

"Cleverly done, and the man deserves to escape," cried Tyler, seeing that both he and Li Sung had missed the mark. "It was an artful ruse, and we were taken in. It just shows that they have a fellow down there who has sharp wits, for by attracting our notice to one part of the jungle they made the task of setting the bush on fire possible. But what are we to do? Sit still and be roasted or smothered by the flames and smoke, or descend the rock and make a fight of it?"

"That no savee us, massa," exclaimed Li Sung. "We dead all de same, and de pirate takee de head. Li say stay here a little bittee and see which way de wind blow. P'r'aps it send de fire along de rock and not reach us."

"There is no use in thinking that that will happen," replied Tyler, "for there is hardly any breeze just now, and once well alight the bushes will burn up in this direction. What about the top? Surely by hanging over the other side we might escape the heat and smoke."

As he spoke he turned and stared at the summit of the rock, which cut clear and sharp across the sky, showing a thin ridge on the farther side of which the mass fell

away abruptly, forming a slope which was so precipitous that no one could hope to retain a footing.

"If we could get over there we should be safe for a time," he said to himself, "and the enemy could not reach us with the poor muskets which they possess. We will wait and see how the fire goes, and then, if necessary, we will retreat to the top Now how could we manage to retain a position there for a time? Our strength would soon give way if we had to cling with our hands."

Unconsciously he asked the question aloud, and as if it had been addressed to him the cunning Chinaman turned and answered it without the slightest delay.

"Massa havee saved de China boy more dan once," he said in grateful tones. "Him catchee Li Sung by de coat when him almost smothered wid de water, and now him show how both keep away from de fire. Li say dat we hang on de oder side easy. We take de cloth from de waist and make him into a loop. Den we put de leg into him and sit dere easy till de flames havee gone. He, he, he! We not catched yet by a velly long way."

The prospect of dangling over the steep cliff seemed to afford this son of the East the greatest satisfaction, for again he beamed upon his young leader, while he whipped the cloth from about his waist, and with a deft twist fashioned it into a loop. At the opposite end he formed another, and then twisted the material on itself till it had the appearance of a rope.

"Plenty fine and strong," he said, holding it up with pride. "De one end hang on a rock or de stump of a bush, and de oder for de leg."

"I believe you have thought of the very thing," exclaimed Tyler in delight. "With a sling like that we could sit all day long and never tire. We will wait till the heat gets too great for us and then we will retire. Get hold of your share of the ammunition and food while I take mine. Now, how is the bonfire going."

He almost laughed as he spoke, but a moment later his face wore a serious expression, for though but little time had elapsed since the man below had so daringly set fire to the bushes, yet the hot sun overhead had dried the wood till it was like tinder, and scarcely had it felt the flame than it flared in all directions. Then, as if there had been a train of powder laid beneath, the conflagration spread almost as fast as a man could run, for all the world like the veldt fires in Africa, and, sweeping along the straggling line, quickly reached the base of the rock. And here, with abundant material before it upon which to vent its power, the flame spread to either hand, and thence came marching up the steep rock, fanned by a gentle breeze from the river. Like an army in straggling array it swept the rock before it, and halting here, falling back there for an instant as it met with a bush of more succulent wood, which defied its power on account of its moisture, it came staggering upwards, ever upwards, roaring as it went, and sending forth dense masses of blinding, hot smoke. Very quickly the bushes which grew just below the retreat in which Tyler and the Chinaman had taken up their station were singed and frizzled by the heat, while they themselves were driven backwards. A minute and they were racing up the steep slope, madly eager to escape from the fire and get to a safe distance.

"Here is a clear spot with only one strong bush growing," gasped Tyler, as they reached the summit, halting at a spot which was clear and bare of growth save for a solitary bush. "Out with your knife, Li, and hack it down. That's the way. Leave enough to fasten our slings to."

Desperately and in all haste did the Chinaman carry out the order, for a hot wave fanned his cheek, and a cloud of smoke and sparks told him that he had no time for delay. In a few minutes, therefore, he had lopped off the greater part of the bush, leaving the base of it alone. And to this, thrusting their slings over the gnarled and twisted root till they were close to the ground, did the two suspend their

weight, hoping that it would not fail them and send them tumbling to the ground beneath.

Meanwhile the pirates below had watched with eager eyes as the fire advanced, and set up a babel of discordant shouts as they saw the two figures above forced to retreat. With loud and discordant yells they followed their course to the summit of the rock, and then, as they watched and noted the methodical way in which the bush was lopped off and the slings attached, a doubt, and fear that after all they were to be beaten in this, their final attempt, assailed them. With a shout of indignation and annoyance they raced through the jungle to the back of the rock, and, arrived there, stared up at Tyler and Li Sung, who swung easily at their posts, their weight supported by the slings, while they prevented their bodies from swaying too much by grasping the edge of the rock with their fingers. Instantly a fusillade was opened in their direction, the bullets for the most part falling short, or pattering harmlessly against the rock. A few, however, struck with resounding thuds, warning Tyler that a blow from one, while it would not penetrate perhaps, would be likely to stun the one who was hit should it happen to come in contact with his head.

"We must put a stop to that game," he said suddenly. "They seem to have forgotten that we, too, are armed, and we must remind them. Just place your hand on my shoulder to steady me, and I will give them a shot. That's the way. Now I can lift my rifle without swinging round and running the risk of toppling over."

That the precaution was very necessary both could see, for, suspended as they were, with one leg thrust through the sling till the latter gripped them about the thigh, the greater part of their weight was above the point of support, and had it not been for the grip which each had obtained on the edge of the rock they would have run the danger of capsizing and slipping from the sling. It was a matter of some difficulty, therefore, to make use of a weapon, but with Li to help him

Tyler contrived to get his rifle to his shoulder. Then he calmly selected the nearest of the pirates, and just as the latter was about to fire at him, he pressed the trigger and sent his bullet into the man.

"See how they scamper away," he cried with a laugh, as the Malays took to their heels. "We shall not be troubled again by their firing, I fancy, and very soon darkness will hide them from our view. I suppose that it is not possible to clamber down this side, for it has suddenly struck me that the rock will be very hot on the farther slope."

Both looked well about them before deciding upon the matter, and searched the steep face upon which they hung with the hope that they would be able to discover some ledge, a few projections perhaps, which would afford a means by which they would be able to reach the ground below. But a goat could not have hoped to retain a footing there, for the rock might very well have been cut with a knife, so smooth and unbroken was its surface, and so precipitous was its slope. Therefore both gave up the idea, and at once prepared to clamber over the ridge once more.

"We have been here a quarter of an hour, and at the rate at which the flames were advancing I imagine that the fire will have burnt itself out by now," said Tyler, as he attempted to peer over the top. "How lucky for us that we had this place to retreat to, and that the edge of the rock kept the heat and smoke away! But for that we should have been stifled, and should have rolled in a helpless condition to the bank below. But I fancy that there is very little smoke now, and when I have waited ten minutes longer I shall hoist myself up, and see what is happening. After that we can sit on the very top and wait for the rock to cool."

The time he had mentioned having at length passed, Tyler hoisted himself with all gentleness by means of the sling, and peered over the summit of the ridge, to find that the farther side had been swept clear of all bushes, and lay blackened and smoking below him. Here and there a tiny flame still existed,

feeding upon the underwood beneath some mass of vegetation which had been of large proportions. But for the most part the fire was gone, while the smoke was disappearing every minute. Of the pirates there was no sign at first, but as Tyler's head appeared over the top, they emerged from the edge of the jungle and set up a shout of defiance.

"Aloft there!" called out the one who had now assumed the leadership; "do not think that you will escape us, for we are determined to capture you. Indeed, our lives are forfeited if we fail to do so. Up to this you have kept us at bay, for your guns are good, and can reach farther than ours, while the boulders and rocks protect you. But men can climb in the dark, and seeing that we cannot drive you to submission by means of a fire, we will close upon you in the night. Think and dream of that. If you lie down and sleep, or sit there watchful as a hawk, the end will still be the same, for we shall creep silently upon you. When you feel most secure we shall lay our hands upon you, and then, my friends, a time awaits you in Rembas. We hear that the men of Sarawak are coming up, and since that is the case we will kill you both with certain ceremonies, so that luck may come to us. I who am one of the sea Dyaks swear that this shall be your fate."

With a defiant wave of his hand the man disappeared in the forest, and though Tyler stared after him, and watched the intervals between the trees, he could see no one else. Then he turned to Li Sung to gather the man's meaning, and afterwards directed his gaze to the river.

"Evidently they mean to cut off escape in that direction," he said, "for one of their sampans is taking up a position off the bank, and will lie there during the night, moving slowly backwards and forwards. Perhaps they expect us to steal down and capture one of their boats, but they will be mistaken. And that reminds me. Come up, Li Sung, and point out to me the spot where we hid the craft in which we entered the river."

It wanted but a few seconds to enable the active Chinee to come to his master's side, and at once he swung to the right and pointed eagerly to the edge of the rock.

"Allee rightee," he exclaimed in a whisper. "De pirate below not find him for sure, and de fire not go dat way. Massa can see dat dere am no bushes till de ones dat hidee de boat, so allee velly fine. We runnee away in him."

"Yes, and the sooner the better," said Tyler with unusual decision. "We have to go. That is perfectly clear, for we shall be killed or starved to death if we remain. Very well, then the question follows as to when we shall go. Shall it be at once, when the darkness has fallen, or shall it be during the night? My vote is given for an instant start, for otherwise the pirates will discover the boat as they creep this way; and then, again, they will rush us as we are preparing to leave. Better go as soon as the night comes, so as to get away before they can have surrounded the rock."

"And massa will choose de river and de boat?" asked Li Sung.

"Yes, the jungle is out of the question. It will be filled with scouts, who will be at points all round the edge of the clearing."

"Den you say dat we sneak to de sampan and out into de river?"

"Yes, Li, but not at once. You may be sure that those fellows are watching all round, and I think that to attempt to embark opposite here will end in discovery. If we go to the right, or strike into the jungle behind, the same will happen."

"Den massa says go de oder way?" demanded Li in amazement. "He say go where all de pirates am now, and where dey arrive to attack us?"

The proposition was, to say the least of it, a startling one, and yet Tyler was not inclined to relinquish it. For he had had long to think the matter over, and as he sat there looking down through the semi-darkness which had now covered the land, he felt sure that an attempt to leave the rock would be

suspected. Indeed it was more than likely that the threat which the Dyak leader had shouted to him was merely meant to throw dust in his eyes, to make him think that an attempt would be made to assault during the night. Instead of doing that, however, the pirates would probably at once take up commanding positions, and then, in the belief that the two Chinamen would descend and slip into the darkness, would keep their eyes alert and make every effort to take them. Would they think to guard every spot alike? No. As Tyler considered the point he felt sure that that part of the forest where they were at that moment would be deserted, and that it was by that path that they must escape.

"You see," he said, suddenly turning upon Li Sung, "they know that we have seen them land, and that their boats are pulled up there. They have been in that position ever since they came, and they will reckon that we shall keep away from it as far as possible. Is that not what others would do?"

For answer the Chinaman gently scratched the top of his head, for though cunning he was no reasoner, and, to tell the truth, had he been alone would have elected to go in the opposite direction to that which his leader had suggested.

"Well," demanded Tyler, staring into his face eagerly, "what would a man of your country do? What would you do?"

"Me go de oder way. Me slip into de forest and runnee for de life," gasped Li Sung.

"And that is what the majority of fellows would do. That is what the pirates would do, and will expect of us. Then we take the road I have pointed out, and if we are discovered—"

"Li Sung plenty knowee den," exclaimed his follower, snatching at his knife and brandishing it in the air. "Li not care how he go, so long as massa lead de way; but he can fight. He hate de pirate!"

"Then we will settle the matter, for it is already almost time to set out."

For some thirty minutes the two crouched there on their

perch, discussing their plans and listening eagerly for sounds of the enemy. Then, having tucked their revolvers into their belts, and swung their rifles over their shoulders, they began to creep down the steep slope of the rock, taking a line which would bring them to the spot where they had hidden the boat. Soon slight sounds came to their ears, and as they halted to listen each realized that the enemy was on either hand and behind, and that the noise which they could hear was made by the pirates as they stole through the forest to take up their positions.

"They are preparing to catch us, but are not quite ready yet," whispered Tyler. "Then we will not waste a moment, for while they move into position we will slip away."

Sweeping the ground before him with his hands ere he ventured to take a step in advance, Tyler at length reached the foot of the rock, and at once crept into the bushes which, owing to the fact that they were growing far to one side, had escaped the conflagration. Ah, there was the light river-boat! and in a trice the two silent figures were bearing it away on their shoulders. Turning to that part of the bank which had been occupied by the enemy they stole along in that direction, their feet buried in the hot ashes left by the fire, which effectually masked any sounds which might have been made. Soon a belt of trees barred their progress, and at once dropping the boat they grasped it with both hands and bore it along dangling at arm's-length. A hundred yards were covered in absolute silence, and both were beginning to think that fortune had befriended them and that freedom was before them, when Tyler gave vent to a startled cry, and of a sudden, as if the ground had been cut from beneath his feet, disappeared from view.

"Quick, massa! Where am you?" demanded Li Sung eagerly, while a shout in the forest told that Tyler's cry had been heard. "You speakee plenty quick, and Li comee to helpee you."

"I'm down below in a hole of some sort," answered Tyler

swiftly, picking himself up and feeling about in the darkness. "I have got into a trap of some sort, for I can feel a number of pointed bamboos all about me, and was lucky to miss falling upon them and being spiked. Lean down and haul me up quickly. Now up with the boat again and run. This way to the river!"

Realizing the plight into which his master had fallen, Li Sung no sooner heard what had happened than he threw himself upon his face at the edge of the yawning pit into which Tyler had tumbled, and, stretching out a hand, rapidly hoisted the latter out. Then both grasped the boat once more and set off for the river at the fastest pace. As for the pirates, they set the jungle ringing with their shouts, and, uncertain what had happened, for the trap had not been of their setting, but had been prepared for some old engagement now long forgotten, they rushed hither and thither, calling to one another to tell them where the enemy were.

"Into the water with her, and on board," said Tyler as they reached the bank of the river and waded in. "Now, have you a paddle? Then let every stroke tell."

There was no need for explanation, for both knew that they must pull for their lives. Kneeling, therefore, in the bottom of the boat, they each grasped a paddle with both hands and thrust the blade deep into the river. Then the surface swirled behind them, the craft gathered way, and ere a minute had passed they were shooting along beneath the overhanging branches.

"Keep where we are," gasped Tyler as he laboured at his paddle. "It is pitch dark in here, while outside the sharp eyes of the natives would pick us out. Keep a good look-out, and be ready to push her off in case we run into the bank."

That the latter was a likely occurrence was to be expected, for beneath the leafy avenue even in brilliant daylight all was sombre and clouded with gloom, while now that darkness had fallen and the sun had disappeared the tunnel under the trees presented not a ray, and indeed was buried in such obscurity

that the two fugitives felt as though hemmed in by it, as though they could actually feel the darkness which surrounded them. But what could they do? Emerge into the open, so as to escape the risk of plunging into the trunk of a tree or running aground? That would be madness, for, as Tyler had observed, the night outside was not so black that the eyes of the Malays and sea Dyaks would fail to pierce it. And once they caught even the faintest glimpse of the flying boat, a suspicion even that it was paddling in that direction would bring them howling after it, and then the fate of the two Chinamen would be sealed. Yes, in an instant Tyler realized their precarious position; and though for the moment he considered whether it would not be better to halt where they were and lie still beneath the trees, he dismissed the idea next second, feeling that were they to do so the pirates would soon surround the spot, and, confident that they had cut off escape, would remain patiently till morning came and allowed them to surge down upon their daring enemies. Forward, therefore, and at all speed, was the order, and, reckless of the consequences, they plunged their paddles still deeper into the water till the bows of the tiny river-boat hissed against the stream, and sent the foam scudding on either side.

Hark! A shout, louder and more piercing than any which had preceded it, suddenly burst from the forest behind them, while the babel of voices came to an abrupt end. Then the cry was repeated, and ere a second had passed an answering hail came from up and down the river. Almost at the same moment the prow of the river-boat dashed into a pile of drift-wood, and, running forward till half her length was piled upon it, came to a halt, stranded there beneath the tunnel of trees.

"Hop out and float her again," whispered Tyler calmly. "Now stand still and listen. You heard the hail? Then did you catch those which answered it?"

"Yes, massa. A shout came from up de river, and anodei from down below. We am caught. We am prisoner at last, and when de day comee again poor Li and him massa die.

Dey lose de head, and when de men comee from Sarawak and kill de pirate dey find dem slung to de back of de Dyaks."

Many a time, no doubt, had the humble Chinee seen men of the race which inhabited Borneo setting out upon an expedition to levy war upon their neighbours, and time and again had he observed the fact that all, or nearly all, of the warriors carried the heads of former victims slung to their girdles, for that was their custom. No wonder, therefore, as the prospect of imprisonment conjured up the scene and brought it afresh to his memory, that he shivered there, and, seeing that the end seemed so near, thought only of the worst. But Tyler also had heard of the custom, and indeed had even seen it with his own eyes. However, he was not the lad to be so easily frightened, and moreover he recognized the fact that life was sweet, and that to retain it now all his thoughts must be directed to escape, and not to the consequences of capture.

"Silence!" he exclaimed in low but commanding tones, the firmness of which caused the Chinaman to suddenly cease his whining. "We are not caught yet, and even if we are, what will it matter to either of us if our heads are taken and carried about, for we shall be dead? Don't be foolish, for, as I have said, we are not taken yet. There is a saying amongst my people which runs: 'First catch your bird, then cook him'. Let the pirates lay hands on us, then, and it will be time to moan about our fate. For the present it is our work to get away from them, and for my part I mean to escape whatever the difficulties. Now, get hold of the bows and lift. That's the way. Turn to the left and scramble into the jungle."

Abashed by the lecture which he had received, and encouraged by the bravery and calmness shown by his leader, Li Sung obediently carried out the order, and, lifting the head of the boat, carried it towards the bank. Tyler picked up the stern, and together they bore their craft into the jungle close at hand, and deposited it silently there.

"They shall have their patience tried," he said, as he threw himself upon the ground. "No doubt that shout warned men

who were watching up and down the river, and now that they have been put on their guard the others will embark and will scour every foot of the water. If we had stayed on the drift-wood we should have been discovered, for they will search with torches to help them. Now we are hidden again, and can wait till the noise and the keenness of the hunt have died down."

"Hush, massa! Li hear someting, and him tink he see a light too."

Whispering the words the faithful fellow stretched forth a warning hand and touched Tyler on the sleeve. Then both stared through the jungle, and made sure that they could hear faint sounds, as of someone paddling, approaching close to them. As for the light, at first it was difficult to determine whether Li Sung had been drawing on his imagination, or whether he had actually seen one. But presently a dull reflection on the water as it rippled beneath the trees attracted their attention, and they became aware of the fact that a distant flare, which was all but hidden by the leaves, was illuminating the stream before them.

"Searching the part beneath the boughs," whispered Tyler; "and over there are other torches. Lie still for your life, and do not make a sound. But first get hold of your rifle."

Instantly each swung his weapon to the front, and brought the butt to his shoulder. Then, prepared to fire if occasion should call for it, they lay still as ghosts amongst the bushes, peering at the enemy. It was a strange scene to look upon, and to Tyler as he lay there it brought back memories of many a jolly day at home. For here was a long, narrow native boat, drifting slowly down beneath the boughs, with two men to send it along with an occasional stroke, while some twenty others, all with the scantiest of clothing and with weapons bared, stood or kneeled up and stared at the leaves, into the trees, and amongst the bushes which lined the bank, hoping, with the aid of the light cast from a torch which was thrust into a bed of clay in the bows, that they would be able to find a trace of the fugitives for whom they sought.

Uncanny though the scene was, and in spite of the fact that his life was at stake, Tyler's thoughts flew involuntarily to a day of days which he had spent not so long ago with his school comrades. There was a regatta, and at its end the boats had rowed in procession through the darkness, sending up fireworks, while the majority of the crew stood as well as the craft would permit and called loudly to their friends upon the bank. At the head of each of the craft had smoked and flared a torch of pine-wood which served to lighten the scene. How similar it had been to this at which he was now looking! For a moment he almost forgot the circumstances as he recalled old friends, comrades in the days when he was a lad at school, before the *Dido* had been thought of. Then with a start he remembered his position at that moment, and at once his hand tightened upon the stock of his weapon, while the fingers of his other hand felt for the revolver which was thrust in his belt.

"If they find us, fire the rifle, then give them a few shots with the revolver and fly. But we must take the boat, and must embark within a few seconds."

He whispered the words in his companion's ear, and then watched to see him nod. A second later the native boat drew opposite, and both lay as if glued to the ground, scarcely daring to breathe lest the sound should be heard. Then with feelings of relief they noted that the craft was gradually passing beyond them, and were preparing to turn and congratulate themselves on their good fortune, when one of the natives gave vent to a cry of astonishment, while the boat came to a sudden halt.

"Aground!" cried the man who was stationed in the bows, at once springing over the side; "and—do my eyes deceive me, or is this the mark of a second boat, perhaps the one in which the Chinamen escaped? Remember, comrades, we know that it was by that means that they left us, for they had hidden the craft which brought them here, and their guns prevented us from finding her. What have you others to say?"

He stood aside while his comrades splashed in the water and waded towards him. Then the torch was snatched from its support and brought to the spot, over which all bent eagerly.

As for Tyler and Li Sung, they almost trembled with apprehension, and, believing that they were about to be discovered, brought their weapons to bear upon the gathering of natives, and made ready to discharge them and then run for their lives.

"It is your fancy, comrade," at length cried one of the pirates. "The bows of our boat crashed upon the drift-wood here, as you can see for yourself, for there is a deep furrow. Then you sprang overboard, lightening the load and causing her to move again. There is nothing in these signs, and I therefore urge you to press on. Remember, all of you, that our lives are forfeit if the day dawns and still finds us unsuccessful. Push on then, and let us not delay."

"As you will," grumbled the one who had at first raised the question, and who had spent the time in staring into the jungle towards the spot where Tyler lay. "Only if we lose them on account of the fact that you will not take my warning, then it will be sad for all of us. For me, Rembas shall not see me again, for to return would be to die."

"Then, as we all love the lives which we lead, and desire to go back to our homes, let us push on in all haste," cried his comrade. "Then shall we be more sure of coming upon these rascals."

With a heave they lifted the craft from the obstruction and placed her in deep water. Then they sprang aboard, and before the fugitives could believe their eyes, their enemies were sweeping down the stream, only the reflection of the light being there to show that they actually existed.

"We will let them tire of the search," said Tyler, with a big sigh of relief, "and then we will take to the water ourselves and make for the lower reaches. For the present we will lie still and listen, for others may come this way."

And so with ears straining for sounds which would warn them of the near presence of the enemy, and with all their senses alert, they waited in the forest for some three hours or more, not daring to stir from their hiding-place. Then, judging that the keenness of the search was over and that they might venture to take to the river, they crept from the jungle, lifted their boat into the stream, and embarked. A thrust of the foot and she was afloat, and a stroke of the paddle directed her on her way. Then, with the current to carry them, they let her drift silently through the night, being careful, however, to keep her still beneath the overhanging boughs. At length the latter came to an end, and the open river was before them. At once they took to their paddles, and were urging their craft into the centre of the Sarebus when a long, dark object which had been lying in close to the bank shot out behind them and came racing in their wake. Then a dusky figure in the front grasped at a pole, at the end of which was attached a hook with which it was the custom of the pirates of Borneo to tear their enemies from their prahus, and, thrusting it out into the night, made a dash at the unconscious figure of the rearmost of the two at the paddles. It caught; the hook passed beneath his arm and became entangled in his clothing.

"Back!" shouted the pirate. "Hold on your paddles!"

There was a startled cry of surprise, the guttural exclamation of a Chinaman, and ere Tyler had time to think, he was over the side and being dragged into the enemy's boat. Down came the shaft of the pole upon his head, rendering him unconscious of the roughness with which he was handled. Thrust here and there, hauled this way and that, he was at length pushed into the stern and left to lie there, while the pirates turned their attention to the remaining fugitive. But of him there was not a sign. The darkness or the river had swallowed him up.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Narrow Escape

SWIFT indeed had been the misfortune which had fallen on Tyler and his comrade as they escaped down the river Sarebus. So sudden and unexpected, in fact, that the former hardly realized that he had been caught by means of some instrument and was being dragged through the water, while the boat in which he had been kneeling, plying his paddle with all his might, swept on and away from him, urged by the powerful arm of the Chinaman. As for the latter, until the shout of the pirate who wielded the long pole and hook broke on his ear, he had no suspicion that the enemy was at hand, for the hiss of the water as it surged against the prow drowned all other sounds. But the sudden call caused him to sit upright with a jerk and turn his head, only to perceive the figure of his young master disappearing in the darkness. A moment later he had shot away from the pursuers, and, turning the craft with a dip of the paddle, lay still upon the surface, while the latter, still plying their oars, swept away in advance, searching there for the second of the gallant Chinamen who had caused them so much suffering.

Ten minutes later Tyler regained consciousness, and would have started to his feet had not a naked foot pressed him to the floor.

"What has happened?" he demanded in bewildered tones. "We were running down-stream, and it began to look as though we were going to give those fellows the slip. Then— Li Sung, you may not know it, but you are standing on my

chest, which is not very comfortable. Just take your foot away and allow me to sit up."

"Lie still, you dog!" was the answer, in a language which he did not understand, but which he knew must be Dyak. "Lie quiet where you are, I say, and stir not if you value your comfort. Would you warn your comrade then? That will silence you."

The native who had charge of the prisoner lifted his paddle and hit at the prostrate figure lying beneath him in the darkness. But, fortunately for the latter, the blow failed to reach the mark, and, striking the bottom of the boat within an inch of his head, almost dashed a hole through the woodwork. But it had the desired effect, for Tyler at once realized his position and held his tongue, while the recollection of what had happened came to him like a flash in spite of his dizzy condition.

"I remember now," he said to himself with something approaching a groan. "A hook caught me under the arm, and before I could make out what was up, I was splashing in the water and was being dragged into another boat. Then some fellow caught me a crack over the head, and—by Jove! how sore I am! They must have pulled me about and kicked me pretty savagely, for I feel as though every bone in my body were broken. And I'm a prisoner."

The thought set him wondering what would be his fate, though that was a question which required little answering. Then he began to think of Li Sung, and with a feeling of gladness he realized that the Chinaman had made good his escape.

"Then, after all, there may be some chance for me," he said to himself. "Captain Keppel and the Rajah of Sarawak were to put in an appearance at the mouth of the river on this date, and were to await our report there. If Li has got clear away he will, no doubt, lie up in some quiet spot and think the matter out. Then he will see that he can do no good alone, and he will at once set his face down-stream, and will

row for all he is worth. The tide will help him, and by the time the night comes again he will be at the rendezvous. Then the anchors will be raised, and the schooners will sail up with the flood, and may, perhaps, be here by the following evening. By then I shall be—"

Once more he broke off suddenly, realizing with a feeling akin to despair that he would be dead, for was it likely that the pirates would keep him a captive for long?

"Hardly," whispered Tyler to himself. "They will be angry, and men who are in that condition do not pause and allow time to keep them from their revenge. To-day, within a few hours, they will commence to torture me, and then all will be over, and Li will have had his journey for nothing, while I shall be another of the victims to be added to the long list already set down to the brutality of these pirates."

The conviction was not a very cheerful one, and for long it occupied our hero's thoughts to the exclusion of all others. And all the while, as he lay there prostrate on the floor of the boat, with throbbing head and limbs which ached in every part, the native who stood guard over him still rested a naked foot heavily on his chest, while ever and anon he turned his eyes from the dark surface of the river to the spot where his prisoner lay.

"One of the dogs at least is in our power," he kept saying to himself, "and when the day comes, and the sun sails up to the sky, the second will come beneath our eyes. Then we shall return to Rembas in great favour, and our comrades will speak well of us. And afterwards there shall be a feast, when our prisoners shall afford us some amusement. And supposing the other dog escapes?"

The question set him wondering what would be their reception at Rembas, and he was bound to confess to himself that the chief who had sent them out to make the captures would have something to say.

"He will scowl at us, and call us cowards and dogs," said the native. "But he will do us no evil, for have we not been

partially successful? For that reason he will talk, and then he will forgive. But we shall have to incur the laughter of our comrades."

Once more the man lapsed into silence, while the boat sped on its course. But nowhere was there a sign of Li Sung, though they searched every foot of that portion of the river, and shouted a warning to their comrades who had taken up their posts above and below, in the hope of capturing the fugitives as they passed. Then, slowly at first, and later with the same swiftness with which it was wont to leave the earth, the day came full upon them, and they could see for miles along the surface.

"Not a boat in sight, comrades," said the leader, the native who had charge of Tyler. "One of the men we have with us, but where is the other? Has anyone seen or heard aught of him?"

He looked round at his crew with questioning eyes, and, hearing no response, spoke to them again.

"Then what are we to do?" he demanded fiercely. "You have all heard what our chief has promised to do to us if we who were so many returned unsuccessful. Well, we are that. We have but one captive, while the second is at large. Shall we return at once, or will it meet your views if we kill this dog who lies beneath my foot, and then sail for the lower reaches? For myself, I fear to enter Rembas again, for the thought that our companions will jeer at me is worse than the fear of death."

"And with us also," cried his companions. "We have fought hard, and are weary. But rather than go now to our homes to rest, we will row on if to return is to mean trouble with those who remained behind."

"It was a bad day for all of us when we were chosen for the duty," burst in another when his comrades had done and there was silence in the boat; "but I fail to see why we should fear to return to Rembas. Tell me, my friends, who can say where the second of the Chinamen has got to? Is

there a man here who set eyes on him or on his boat after we captured the fool who lies at the bottom of our own craft?"

The Dyak, a shrivelled-up and aged man, peered at each one of the crew in turn, his beady eyes passing their faces one by one without discovering an answer.

"No one responds," he went on with a cunning smile. "Then can our brothers in Rembas tell more? Can they say that he has escaped simply because we have not laid hands upon him? Ye are children, who need a man of my years and experience to nurse you. Listen to me, and say whether this will suit our case. We were told off for this matter, and the fates willed it that we should meet with great trouble; for how were we to guess that these Chinese dogs would prove so cunning? And how could we foretell the fact that the two who were caught by the bore would be armed with guns, good guns, mark you, my brothers, which shot better than our own? Others would have found the task impossible, but we were not to be so easily beaten, and though weary we clung to our ground. Then fortune came our way, and we captured one of the dogs, while with a blow of the pole to which the hook is attached the boat in which they rowed was sent to the bottom, with a big hole through the boards. Tell me, does not the stream on the river Sarebus run fast, and are not men easily drowned in its waters? Then that is the fate which has befallen the second of the Chinamen. He is dead, and by to-night the body will be washing out to sea, there to satisfy the mouths of the sharks which keep watch there. It is all plain and simple, and those at Rembas will recognize the truth of the story we tell."

With another cunning glance the man took his seat, and, dipping his paddle into the stream, turned the head of the boat towards the distant town of Rembas.

"Come," he continued persuasively, "believe what I say, and agree to tell the tale as I have told it. And recollect that we have with us one prisoner who will help to make us welcome."

For some little time the others, who sat or kneeled in the boat, looked at one another doubtfully, while they discussed the matter in low tones. Then they began to see that their comrade had pointed out the only path which they could take, and on considering it they saw that the tale was a likely one.

"And besides," said the man who had had the post in the bows, "I remember that as I thrust a second time at the figure of the man who still remained to be taken, the hook struck heavily against the craft, and may well have capsized it or battered a hole in the boards. Yes, the tale is good, and we should agree to it."

And so, after a deal of discussion and eager conversation, the head of the boat was turned again to Rembas, for the stream had swung her round. Then the paddles dipped in the water, and very soon they were at their journey's end.

"Rise! The chief awaits you!"

The words were shouted in Tyler's ear, while his custodian kicked him savagely in the ribs. Then signs were made that he was to mount the slope which led to a formidable-looking stockade, and was to enter the gate which stood wide open.

"Come," shrieked the man, angered at the delay which had occurred in the carrying out of his orders, "stir yourself and be quick, or I will find something better and more persuasive than a foot. Here, stand on your legs!"

With that he clutched at Tyler's clothing and swung him over the gunwale of the boat and on to the ground beside the edge of the water. Then two others came to his aid, and in a moment they had set him upon his feet and had given him a push in the direction in which he was to go. But, to their amazement, the prisoner collapsed at once, and fell heavily upon his face.

"He would make believe that he cannot stand. He is a cunning dog!" cried one of them. "Let us try again, and set something beneath him to keep him upright. Ah, perhaps the point of a knife will help him!"

Once more Tyler was hoisted to his feet, while the ruffian who had spoken last whipped a knife from his waist-cloth, and held it so that the prisoner would meet with an injury if he was so foolish as to fall. Then his comrades were in the act of starting aside when a by-stander interfered.

"You will kill the man and rob us of our fun," he called out suddenly, starting forward as he did so. "See! Have you no eyes? The fellow is weak with loss of blood, and here is the spot from which it comes."

He pointed to the arm where the knife had struck some few hours before, and then to the garments below, which were stained red with blood. As for Tyler, he made no movement, but watched his captors through half-closed eyes; for he had a difficult game to play, and felt that the moment was a critical one.

"If I show fight, or am strong and can walk, they will treat me badly," he had said to himself as he lay upon the floor of the boat and thought the matter out. "Then their chief will have me brought before him, and will endeavour to get some information from me; for the chances are that he will guess that I have something to do with the English of Sarawak. I should refuse, of course, and then, seeing that I was of no further use, he would give the order for my execution. That will not suit me, for my object is to gain time. Captain Keppel will be at the mouth of the river by now, and Li Sung will reach him to-night. To-morrow night at the earliest is the hour when I may expect them. I must pretend to know a lot, and yet be too weak to talk. Then in the hope of getting news from me when I am stronger they will curb their impatience and treat me well. Also, finding that I am helpless, they will not be so watchful, and perhaps I may manage to give them the slip."

The plan seemed to be a good one, and as Tyler had thought it out in the darkness, and had sought for a good excuse for his weakness, the wound produced by the kriss which had struck him in the arm occurred to him, and he had at once commenced to tear the bandage from it.

"That will allow the wound to bleed freely for a time and to stain my clothing," he said to himself. "I am wet from head to foot, so that a little blood will spread and look like a lot, and so mislead them. Yes, when the day comes I shall pretend to be almost on the point of death, and shall be incapable of standing.

"See!" cried the man again, drawing attention to the prisoner's arm. "He has a wound, and it has bled freely, which accounts for his weakness. Let me tie a cloth about it, and then carry him, for we do not desire to see our captive slip from our fingers, and so rob us of the pleasure which we hope to have. Stand aside, you who gape and hold the knife, while I see to the man."

Evidently the one who had spoken was of some consequence, for his comrades did not demur, and instead stood on one side; while the one who had drawn his kriss returned it to its place looking abashed and uncomfortable as he did so. A few moments later the wound was roughly bound, and Tyler was being carried up into the stockade. A sheltered spot was found for him, and he was placed upon the ground, while orders were given for water and food to be brought to him. Then those who had captured him went in a body to their chief to tell him the tale which they had agreed upon. As for Tyler, left alone in the shadow of one of the huts, he dared not so much as move an arm lest someone should be watching.

"I must remember the part I am playing," he said to himself, "and must on no account appear to be shamming. When they see that I am helpless they will leave me alone, and perhaps I shall have the night to myself. Ah, here comes someone!"

Through his half-closed lids he caught sight of a woman advancing towards him, and at once made ready to act his part. Closing his eyes, he lay so still that he might have been dead, and made no movement when the woman spoke to him. A second later his hand was grasped and the arm lifted to its fullest height, only to be dropped again, to see,

perhaps, whether it would fall with a crash, or whether this seemingly unconscious man had power to control it. However, Tyler guessed the object of the movement, and allowed the limb to fall with all its weight. Then he felt a gourd placed to his lips, while a few drops of cold water were allowed to trickle into his mouth.

"He is but young, and will recover," said the woman in soft tones. "He is one of a race whom we admire, for their men are hard and can fight and work well, and by the tale which has come to us this lad and his comrade, who is dead, made a fine stand against our men. Well, it is a pity, for he must die. But the chief has sent word that he is to be carefully tended, for the rogue may have news of these white people who propose to come up the river and attack us. Not that we care much for the tale, for Rembas is safe against thousands. There, I have sent some water down his throat, and in a little time he will be better and will be sensible. He shall have some food then, and perhaps to-morrow morning he will be well enough to be killed."

She did not seem to see the strangeness of her words, but took it for granted that once her charge was better he would be executed. Indeed, to her mind such a course seemed only natural, for if the prisoner were not strong and fully alive, how could he afford amusement to the pirates, a collection of people who revelled in cruelty? And therefore, having done her best for him, she left him to himself and went about her daily work, wondering where the youthful Chinaman had come from, and how it was that he happened to be in the river Sarebus. As for Tyler, no sooner had the woman left him to himself than he gently opened his eyes and looked about him, carefully taking stock of the buildings and of the forts which were erected on every hand.

"Evidently making preparations for the attack which is expected," he said, observing that guns had been placed in position in many places, so as to command the approach from the river, and that stockades were being built. "But our guns would

quickly send them flat to the ground, and scatter the pirates. How much I should like to be present at the engagement, and what would I not give to be able to get away now and inform my commander of the preparations being made to resist him? Yes, when the guns have done their work the real excitement will begin, for the boats will row right in till they are within gun-shot, and then they will have to surmount the booms which are outside. And there is another question of importance. Captain Keppel ought to know the exact position of those booms, so as to send a boat ahead to blow a hole through them. I must get away! The very first chance I get I shall take to my heels and make a bolt for it."

It was a desperate resolve to make, but a natural one under the circumstances; for what else could he do? To lie there simply meant that his end was put off for a few hours. Sooner or later, if he but waited for it, he would be dragged to execution, and then no one could save him. Why not, then, snatch at the smallest chance which offered, and trust to his heels to carry him to safety?"

So determined was our hero that, seeing that no one was at hand, he was almost in the act of springing to his feet, when sounds broke upon his ear, and he became aware of the fact that a number of men were approaching, and in their midst the leader of the Rembas pirates. Instantly his eyes closed as if he were still insensible.

"So that is the man who kept you all at bay?" said the chief, looking critically at the unconscious figure at his feet. "A lanky Chinaman, you tell me? But—no, surely not one of that country, for see, his pigtail is almost severed, while the arm which is bandaged is too white for one of that race. This is no Chinaman, but an Englishman. I can tell him at a glance, for I have been at Singapore and at Sarawak."

The news that their prisoner was of greater consequence than they had imagined caused the Malays and Dyaks the greatest astonishment and pleasure, and as their chief assured them that he was an Englishman they danced with delight.

"He will be all the more valuable," said the chief thoughtfully, "for we will contrive to gather news of the intended attack from him. Remember, though we of Rembas are not always on terms of friendship with those who live at Pakoo and at Paddi, yet on this occasion, when all are to meet the foreigner, we shall bury our differences and make common cause against the enemy. For that reason the Dutchman, Hans Schlott, will not refuse if I ask him a favour, and will come hither at my bidding. We will send to him at once, for he can speak the language of these Englishmen, and we will ask him to interview the prisoner. Come, no time must be lost, for many miles of river lie between him and us."

Fortunate for Tyler was it that he could not understand what was said, for then he would have realized that his case was almost hopeless. Hans Schlott to come and interview him as he lay a prisoner at Rembas! Why, the crafty Dutchman would recognize him in a moment, and would at once insist on his execution. That such would be the consequence of a meeting between the man who had murdered Mr. Beverley and Tyler Richardson could not be doubted, and had our hero but known of the proposal to send for him, have but dreamed that ere noon of the following day the Dutchman would be there in the stockade which surrounded Rembas, there is no doubt that he would have watched eagerly for the smallest loophole for escape, and would have snatched at it instantly, however desperate the chance which it offered. However, perhaps it was as well that he was ignorant of the facts, for his peace of mind was less disturbed in consequence, and he was able to devote more attention to his surroundings and to plans for getting away than would have been possible had the dread of an interview with Hans Schlott been before him.

"Yes, he is an Englishman, and comes from Sarawak, I'll be bound," went on the chief of the Rembas pirates, closely inspecting the unconscious prisoner again. "He may have come here by accident, having been washed in by the flood from the sea, or he may have come hither with the object of

spying upon us. The last is the most likely. But we shall soon know, for the Dutchman will interrogate him, and if his tongue wags but slowly in reply, we shall have a means to quicken it. But let us see to the message. To you," and he took one of the by-standers by the arm, "I give the post of honour. Take a boat and crew this instant, and row for Paddi, bearing this from me: 'The lord of Rembas bids the lord of Paddi greeting, and asks that he take passage in this boat, or in any one of his own vessels, and come to Rembas at once, as we are in need of his services. We have a prisoner, a young Englishman, who is tall and lanky, and we desire to have him questioned, thinking that he has been sent to spy upon us.' There, that should be sufficient. Go now, without loss of time, and nightfall should see you at Paddi. An hour will do for discussion, and after that you will set out to return. By noon to-morrow you will be here with our guest, and we shall be able to look into this matter. When that is done, and the night is fallen, we will have a bonfire in the centre of the stockade, and there we will pass the time pleasantly at the expense of the prisoner."

Once more he ran his eye over the apparently unconscious figure at his feet. Then he turned away and went to see that his orders were carried out without delay. As for the others, they, too, soon went to their huts, and Tyler was left lying in the shadow alone.

"They suspect me," he said to himself, opening his eyes and looking around. "I am not certain, but I think I overheard the word 'Englis', which would make it appear that the chief recognized that I was not a Chinaman. If that is so, he is likely to question me very closely, and he will certainly not be inclined to show me any mercy on account of the fact that I am one of those who are about to attack him. Well, I must wait for night to fall, and then I shall make a dash for it. Ah, they have forgotten to search me for arms!"

With a sudden flush of pleasure he realized that his revolvers still occupied their place in his waist-cloth, and that he had

a means of defence. Then, as there was nothing more to be done, he looked about him till he felt that he knew every corner of Rembas, and then fell into a doze. When he awoke again, the woman who had previously come to his help was standing beside him, and at once she lifted the gourd of water to his lips.

"You are better, but still weak," she said. "Drink, and afterwards I will give you food, for it is only in that way that you will become a man again. There, lie still while I place the food in your mouth."

In her way she was kind to this forlorn prisoner, and seeing that he still appeared to be so weak as to be unable to lift his hands, she fed him with rice, which she conveyed to his lips by means of her fingers. Then she gave him another drink of water, and having placed a roll of matting beneath his head, and the gourd beside him, she left him for the night.

"Sleep," she said, "and when to-morrow comes I will come to you again to feed you. A fine rest to you!"

A moment later she was out of sight, and Tyler found himself alone, lying in the lengthening shadow of a hut which was situated in the very centre of the town of Rembas. Other huts clustered about him, but they seemed to be untenanted, and he soon made sure that they must contain provisions and arms and ammunition. As for the inhabitants, numbers were to be seen at work on the fortifications, busily making them more secure against the expected attack, while others went about their ordinary business. Every now and again someone would stroll past the spot where the prisoner lay, perhaps to satisfy his curiosity; but on each occasion Tyler was lying in precisely the same spot, his head propped upon the roll of matting, and his limbs spread out in a manner which showed that he was helpless. Apparently the pirates were satisfied that there was no deceit, for when the sun went down, and the long shadow cast by the hut suddenly became merged into the general darkness, they did not trouble to move him, but left him there, feeling that he was secure.

"He can come to no harm, and the night air will serve to revive him," said the leader of the Rembas pirates as he passed to his hut. "These pale-faces are not like us, and a very little takes their strength away. But you will see that he will revive by the morning, for he has already taken food. Leave him, and perhaps when the day comes he will be able to sit up, or even to stand upon his feet with help. As for escape, it is out of the question in his case."

Two hours later, when all sounds in the stockade had died down, Tyler prepared to make an attempt to escape, and, as a preliminary, thrust his hand into his waist-cloth and brought his revolvers out, one at a time. Carefully running his hands over them, he made sure that they were ready for use, though whether or not the powder had been spoilt by his short immersion in the river he could not say. Then, having stared about him, and listened eagerly for sounds of any pirate who might happen to be abroad, he rose to his feet and began to steal away in the dense shadow of the hut.

"I must keep out of the rays of the moon," he said to himself, glancing at the sky, where a crescent of the orb was calmly floating. "The light is quite sufficient to show me to an enemy, and, on the other hand, it will enable me to detect one who may be approaching. I'll stick close to the huts, and when I am bound to cross an open space will make a dash for it. Here goes!"

With a revolver in either hand he stole along beside the wall of beaten clay and bamboo, and soon came to the end of the hut. Then, having paused for some moments, he flitted across the space which intervened between it and a second, and once more was buried in deep darkness.

Ah! As he stood there, looking about him with eager eyes in case someone should have seen him, a sound, the rustle of a garment, broke upon his ear, and instantly he became riveted to the spot, his limbs held rigidly, while he searched the shadows with his eyes. There it was again, and as he looked he fancied he caught sight of a dusky figure away on his

right. Was it a Dyak sent to watch the prisoner, and who, seeing that he was about to escape, was following with the intention of springing upon him as his hopes were about to be realized? Yes, that must be the solution of this mystery, and the fellow over there was tracking him, following him like a cat.

At the thought a cold perspiration broke from Tyler's forehead, while his heart thumped so fiercely against his ribs that he even dreaded lest the sound was audible. Then, too, his head throbbed, partly with the rough treatment which he had received when captured, and partly owing to the excitement under which he laboured. He could scarcely think, could hardly gather his wits, and stood there for some seconds scarcely daring to breathe. Then the courage which had helped him thus far through the many dangers which he had of late been called upon to face came to his aid, his old spirit of determination returned to him, and in an instant, it seemed, Tyler Richardson was himself again, peering into the darkness with all his senses alert, and judging the situation with that calmness which had astounded his friends on former occasions.

"Dyak or Malay," he whispered to himself, "it makes no difference to me, for I have met both before, and have beaten them. I will not allow this fellow to spoil my hopes, and will shoot him like a dog if he interferes. But does he see me? I am in the shade, and it is possible that he has lost sight of my figure. Ah, I will play a prank upon him!"

Suddenly perceiving that if the man, whoever he was, had been following, he would have seen him dart across the space lit by the feeble rays of the moon, and that, having watched the prisoner gain the shadow of the hut, the pirate would expect him to creep along beside the latter and emerge again at the farther end, Tyler decided to remain where he was for a time, and so mislead the man.

"By not moving myself I may force him to disclose his own position," he thought, "and then I shall be able to deal with him. And, besides, it is not at all certain that he is actually

following me. Perhaps he has some other game to carry out, and cares nothing for the prisoner."

However improbable the last might be, Tyler did not mean to lose sight of it, and, in accordance with his resolution, crouched in the shadow, and remained perfectly still there, peering out into the comparative light beyond in the hope that he would catch sight of the stranger.

There he was. The swish of a linen garment and the patter of a sandalled foot broke the silence, and a tall figure was seen to glide along beside a hut across the way and disappear round the corner. Strange! He was moving away from Tyler, for now the hut stood between them. But not for long; for ere many moments had passed the same sounds were heard again, and the same ghostly object came into view, this time more easily seen, for the reason that a few stray rays of the moon reached him. Why, he had made a round of the dwelling, and, as if he had failed to find that for which he was searching, was now flitting across to another near at hand! Instantly Tyler turned to follow his movements, wondering what the man could want. Then he suddenly swung right round, for the muzzle of one of his weapons had tapped against the woodwork of the hut, and had given rise to a sharp noise which had instantly brought the stranger to a stop.

"He heard it, and if he did not know of my presence here before he suspects it now," thought Tyler. "It was a piece of carelessness and bad luck, and may cost me my life. Ah, he too is hiding in the shadow and peering in this direction!"

For many minutes did the two silent figures watch each other, or, rather, search the shadows in the vain endeavour to recognize who was hidden there. And more than once did Tyler lift his arm and take aim at his opponent, thinking that to risk a shot would be better, perhaps, than to wait there in such uncertainty, and always with the fear in his heart that another of the pirates might put in an appearance. But however justified the deed, he could not reconcile himself to it.

It seemed so much like murder, like shooting a man from behind; and as the thought came to him our hero lowered his weapon, while he puzzled his brains as to how he should act.

As for the stranger, his patience seemed to swiftly come to an end, and at length he commenced to creep from the shadow towards the spot where Tyler was in hiding. A tall, lanky individual, in that half-light he appeared almost like a giant as he stood for the space of a second to his full height. Then, snatching at a weapon which was thrust in a band of linen about his waist, he dropped on hands and knees and stealthily crawled forward.

"He hopes to attack me in the shadow," thought Tyler, at his wits' end how to act. "If I stay here he will crawl into the shadow higher up, and will then come down beside the wall of the hut, where I shall be unable to see him. That will not do, and as it is clear that I am discovered, and that I shall have to fight for my life, I too will make for the open. If he gives a shout I shall fire and then run for my life."

His mind made up to act in this manner, he threw himself on hands and knees also, and at once crawled out into the open, one weapon thrust into his girdle, and the other held in his right hand. And thus, like two panthers awaiting the moment to spring upon one another, the two ghostly figures advanced across the open. Rapidly did the distance between them lessen, till at last only some fifteen feet separated the combatants. Now was the time to act, and as each grasped the fact, they sprang to their feet. Instantly Tyler's figure stiffened, his arm swung up to the horizontal, and he covered his man with an aim which never left the mark, and which never trembled in spite of his excitement. As for his opponent, he seemed even taller and more forbidding than before, and as he stood to his full height, and raised his naked weapon above his head, the rays of the moon flashed upon him, increasing the ferocity of his appearance. But Tyler was not to be frightened so easily, and indeed scarcely seemed to have taken note of the features of the man. As if to make more certain

of his aim he squinted along the barrel of his revolver and elevated the muzzle just a little till it lit upon some object which glinted brightly upon the naked chest of the man. Then his finger went to the trigger, there was a pause, and slowly the grip tightened. A second and the haunt of the river pirates would have been awakened by the report of a shot, when an exclamation of astonishment burst from our hero.

"What!" he exclaimed in low tones. "Can it be possible, or am I dreaming?"

As if some sight had dazed him, he passed his hand across his eyes, and stared again at his opponent, keeping his revolver levelled at him all the while. Then he advanced a step or two and peered at the stranger. As for the latter, he, too, was acting in a manner strangely different from that which one would have expected. As Tyler had levelled his weapon he had started back a pace. Then he had suddenly leaned forward and stared into the face of the man who stood before him. What were his thoughts no one could say, but there he stood as if spell-bound, not uttering a sound, staring at his silent opponent. A moment later, however, as Tyler gave vent to the words, the figure opposite him had sprung forward, the naked weapon had dropped to the ground, and two hands were groping for his in the semi-darkness.

"Massa! Massa Tyler Richardson! You! de prisoner!"

"And that is Li Sung!" gasped Tyler. "I cannot believe it possible. I am escaping. I thought you were a pirate about to stop me, and in less time than I can think I should have shot you. Then the moon showed me that the bright point at which I aimed was a small brass box in which you carry snuff, and instantly I realized that it must be you. What are you doing here? Speak! We have no time to lose!"

For a few seconds the faithful Li Sung could not respond to his master, so utterly taken aback and staggered was he by the extraordinary ending of what had appeared to be a serious danger. This his master! And the latter had recognized his

servant but just in time, had told him by the snuff-box which dangled about his neck, and which, had he been away in China, amongst his countrymen, would never have been there. Yes, it was strange that a habit which he had learned from the Malays of Borneo should save his life, and that the wearing of a box of metal about his neck should enable his master to find him. His delight was beyond everything. This stoical, placid Chinee was a different being, and for the first time for many a year he was at a loss for words, while his lips trembled and tears started to his slit-like eyes.

"Massa!" he managed to gasp at last. "Li he comee here to find you. He watch de town of Rembas and sneak here when de light die down. Den he creep close to de stockade, and he hear plenty fine words from de sentry who talkee to one of de men. He learn dat you am velly weak, and am wandering in de head. Den Li say dat dat not right. He must getee you away from de place, and he kill de sentry Yes, him not wait to tink velly much, but kill him wid de knife. Den him sneakee into de town, and—"

"And happened to run up against the weak and helpless prisoner," burst in Tyler in a whisper. "It is all plain now, and the rest can be left to later on. Only this I know. You stood by me. You came here at the risk of your life to save me. I shall not forget, and later on will thank you."

"No needee to do dat, massa," was the Chinaman's reply. "Li not alivee to come here if massa not savee him in de river. But time we left de town. What am de orders?"

"That you lead the way to the river, and that we make for the mouth as soon as possible."

Without further conversation they turned their faces to the stockade which surrounded the town of Rembas. At the gate lay the figure of the sentry who had been keeping watch, and whom Li Sung had killed, and over his body each stepped in turn. The gate gave to a slight push, and ere very long they were on the bank of the river which ran direct into the Sarebus.

"De boat or a prahu? What does massa say?"

"The first till we are in the stream, and then the last," was the sharp and unhesitating reply. "Lead the way."

Grasping the edge of the Chinaman's cloak, for it was dark beneath the trees which fringed the bank, Tyler followed Li Sung without a doubt of his ability to lead him. Then, arrived at the spot where the boat was moored, each stepped into her, while a thrust from the Chinaman's brawny leg sent her afloat. There, standing up cutting the silvery beams with a line of black, was the mast of a small river prahu, and at once, as if they had chosen it by common consent, the boat was rowed in that direction. No need to hoist an anchor, for a rope of rattan alone held the barque, and a swift flash of the knife severed it. Then the two dusky figures went to the ropes, and soon the prahu was standing down-stream with bellying sail.

"De bore am gone and de tide am falling," said Li Sung, coming aft to where Tyler stood at the helm. "Keep de ship to de centre of de river and all am safe. Comee de morning and de sea am in sight."

"And perhaps the friends who are waiting for us. Get along forward, Li Sung, and keep a bright look-out, for it would be hard if we were to run on a bank after all that has happened."

Alone upon the wide sweep of water they sailed swiftly towards the mouth of the river Sarebus, and, just as the sun rose, emerged into the sea. Instantly a shout left their lips, and they turned to shake one another by the hand; for anchored behind a tiny sandy promontory were two vessels, one of European build, which was undoubtedly the *Dido*.

CHAPTER XIX

An Attack upon the Stockades

BACK again! We scarcely expected you, and a load of anxiety is lifted from my mind," cried the captain of the *Dido* in hearty tones as Tyler swarmed to the deck of the war vessel, and, leaving Li Sung in the prahu made fast to the gangway below, went striding to the poop. "Come, tell me the news, for I am eager to hear it. Here we are, you see, at the rendezvous appointed, and I may say that all are eager to be moving. Let us get down into the cabin and have a chat."

Seizing the Chinaman, who had boarded the vessel, by the hand, Captain Keppel wrung it with enthusiasm, and then, ere he led the way to his cabin beneath the poop, took a step backwards, the better to be able to survey the gallant young fellow who had so willingly undertaken to ascend the Sarebus and gain tidings of the enemy. As for the crew of the *Dido*, they were not slow to guess what was happening, and, remembering the fact that two Chinamen had so recently taken possession of a prahu, much to their mystification, and that the young fellow who had so recently joined them had been absent ever since, they recognized that this Chinaman who had just come aboard in his tattered and travel-stained garments must be the same. For some moments they waited watching the interview upon the poop. Then, as their commander was seen to grasp the stranger by the hand, their excitement was roused to the highest.

"Took 'im by the 'and!" shouted one lusty tar, lifting an enormous palm to shade his eyes from the sun. "Then if that don't prove that that feller ain't a Chinee after all, well—bust me!"

He paused for a moment to find an expression adequate for the occasion, and then, changing his plug to the other cheek, looked round at his comrades.

"It's the young orfficer what come aboard a few days gone back," he whispered hoarsely. "Him what arrived at Sarawak with the fleet of prahus and a crew of darkies. Strike me! but what's he been up to this time?"

"Been sailing up the river Sarebus," shouted John Marshall, the boatswain of the old schooner, who had taken up his quarters on the *Dido* for the time being, instantly recognizing Tyler as he stood there on the upper deck. "He's been risking his life again. He's been after them 'ere pirates and the Dutch bloke as I told yer about. Here, let's give him a rouser. One, two, now all together!"

Thanks to the fact that John Marshall had a busy and a ready tongue, the crew of the *Dido*, and indeed the greater part of the inhabitants of Sarawak, had long ere this gained news of all the adventures which had befallen Tyler on his way to join his ship, and now that something more had happened, and they gathered the fact that this lad—for he was little more than that—had dared to ascend the river and spy upon the pirates themselves, their enthusiasm knew no bounds, and, leaping forward at John's shout, they rent the air with their cheers, repeating them till Captain Keppel advanced to the rail and lifted his hand to ask for their silence.

"Nicely done, my lads!" he said, in tones of satisfaction. "He will appreciate your cheers far more perhaps than the poor thanks which I can give him. Let me tell you that this officer is a gallant one indeed, and that although he is still practically a new-comer and a stranger to most of you, yet that he has already earned distinction. For the splendid manner in which he brought through the tribe of Dyaks he will deserve commendation at the hands of his seniors, but now he has added something more, and I shall strongly recommend him for reward. There, my lads, I'm even more pleased than are you, and to celebrate the occasion, and be-

cause we have some fun ahead, I'll give orders for a round of grog to be served. Then you can drink success to our friend and to the coming expedition."

Turning away from the men as they sent up another cheer, the commander inspected Tyler closely, and then spoke again.

"You have had a rough time, that I can perceive at a glance," he said with a start. "You are wounded, and there is a hunted look on your face. Come below. A good meal and a glass of wine will do you no harm, and then you can let me have your information."

Taking his junior by the arm he led him to the companion, and ushered him into the cabin. Then he called for food and drink, and would not hear a word from Tyler till the latter had had his wants satisfied. Then the ship's surgeon was called in, and speedily dressed the wound.

"A clean cut, which would have done better had it been dressed at once," he said, as he looked at the arm critically. "But that, of course, is not always possible. Yes, there has been severe hemorrhage, and by the appearance of your cheeks you are still somewhat weak from loss of blood. But that is a matter which can soon be set right. Shall I place Mr. Richardson on the sick-list, sir."

For answer Captain Keppel smiled at our hero, and then turned to his interrogator.

"Ask the lad himself," he said with a laugh. "He does not look to me like the fellow who would willingly miss the fun which we have before us."

"Well, what do you say? Shall it be the sick-list and a bunk in the sick-bay, or a hammock and a good sleep in your own quarters?" demanded the doctor.

"The last, please," answered Tyler without hesitation. "As to the wound, it is really nothing, I assure you. The kriss went through the arm, and almost dropped out by its own weight. It does not hurt at all, and all that I have suffered has been from loss of blood. To that I owe the fact

that I am alive at this moment. But I am dog-tired and want a sleep."

"Then you shall have it, my lad," cried the commander. "But first I must get your news, for time is precious and we have much to do. Come, out with it, and then off to your hammock."

Thus bidden, Tyler rapidly outlined the preparations which he had seen in progress at Rembas, and told Captain Keppel that, having now seen that stronghold in addition to Paddi, he was sure that the former would offer a fiercer resistance. Then, urged by those who were listening, he narrated how he and the Chinaman had held the rock, and had finally taken flight; how he had been hauled into the enemy's boat; and how, while making his escape from the stronghold of Rembas, a strange figure had dogged his footsteps, and had almost joined in combat with him.

"I call it a wonderful piece of luck," exclaimed Lieutenant Horton, who had also joined the party in time to hear the tale. "Anyone else would probably have fired point-blank, and only discovered that the opponent was a friend in reality when it was too late. How fortunate that you caught sight of the tin about the neck of this Li Sung!"

For some little time those who had listened to the tidings which Tyler had brought discussed the matter, commenting on the news and upon the steps which he had taken to make good his escape. Indeed, so interested did they become that their attention was withdrawn from our hero, and when at last they turned to question him further, they discovered that he was fast asleep, his head reclining upon his hands on the cabin table, while his breathing was long and deep, showing how much he was in need of rest.

"Done to a turn," said Captain Keppel in a whisper. "The lad has worked like a Trojan, and has been at it almost since the time when he left Sarawak. We know at any rate that he has not had a wink of sleep for two nights, while he has been fighting most of the time. Catch hold of his legs,

Doctor, while I take his head and shoulders. We'll pop him into his bunk without disturbing him."

In a trice they had Tyler between them, and in less than a minute he was between the blankets, snoring heavily and utterly unconscious of his surroundings. When his eyes opened again, and he looked about him in bewilderment, it was to discover that sunlight was streaming down into his quarters, and that his comrades were hastily donning their clothes.

"Halloo! Still day?" he asked, peering at the others and rubbing his eyes. "What a sleep I've had!"

"Should say so, old chap," was the laughing answer. "At any rate you've lain there like a log since you arrived here, and that was somewhere before noon yesterday."

"Yesterday? Impossible!"

"Not a bit of it. You've slept for twenty hours on end, and if you're not precious slippy you'll be too late to hear all about the expedition. All hands are to muster at once while the skipper reads out the orders."

Tyler was out of his bunk like a shot, and rapidly scrambled into a suit of clothes, tearing the old ones off in a moment. Then he hastily washed his face and hands, and darted up on deck in the wake of his comrades. Above, all were assembled, and listened eagerly as the captain read the orders for the day. Then each man went to the magazine, there to be served with arms, which all at once set to work to clean and put in the best of order. That some big movement was afoot anyone could see, for there was an air of half-suppressed excitement about the tars, and they discussed in eager terms the chances of a hand-to-hand conflict with the enemy.

Early on the following morning all was in readiness, and no sooner had breakfast been finished and swept away than the shrill notes of a pipe rang out, while the bugle of the marines awoke the echoes. Then a boat came pulling alongside, bearing the Rajah of Sarawak.

"We propose to leave Rembas till the last," said Captain

Keppel, as Tyler stood before him and the rajah, having been called on to the poop to speak with them. "We shall leave the *Dido* here and pull up in open boats, taking that tope over there with us. She is well supplied with food and with ammunition, and must be well guarded. And now for the force. Lieutenant Wilmot Horton will be in command, for it is one of the perquisites of his rank to lead an expedition of this nature. But I propose to go also, in my gig, and with me will be the rajah. You will accompany us, Mr. Richardson, and, since you have now been face to face with these pirates on two occasions, we shall expect you to take good care of us.

"And now for the actual men to be taken," he went on, turning away from Tyler with a smile as the latter flushed red at his remarks. "The force of officers and men, sailors and marines, will be approximately eighty in number. We shall take the pinnace, two cutters, my gig, and the *Jolly Bachelor*, which the rajah has kindly placed at my disposal. She is native built, and admirably suited to our needs, for she will take thirty men with ease, besides a six-pounder. The pinnace will be armed with a twelve. The tope will accompany the expedition with food and ammunition, and strung on to our forces we shall have nearly a thousand natives, Borneans, Malays, and Dyaks, but mostly the latter, and a goodly few the same who accompanied Mr. Richardson from along the coast. They may not be of much use in the attack, but I promise you that they will be to the fore if flight is attempted by the enemy, for they do not love them, and have suffered much at their hands."

"They have indeed," burst in the Rajah. "For a century and more their children and wives have been enslaved, and the men killed, while their fruit-trees and their plantations have been cut down and ruined. But you will have to keep a close hand upon these natives, Keppel, for they do not know what discipline means."

"I mean to," was the emphatic answer, "and for that

purpose I am placing one of my officers over them, with strict injunctions to watch them. And now, if you are ready, Rajah, we will set out."

The ruler of Sarawak having assented, the bugles and whistles once more set the echoes ringing, and very soon the boats of the expedition had been marshalled. Drawing a rifle from the magazine, Tyler dropped into the gig and awaited the coming of his commander. Half an hour later all were in readiness, and having turned the bows of the boats in that direction they were pulled into the river Sarebus. In spite of the fact that a deluge of rain poured down upon their heads not one of the attacking-party seemed to mind, or to have his high spirits damped. For the weather was warm, and each one wore a kajan, a mat through which the head was thrust, which effectually protected them from the wet. Then, again, who could say what would happen? Perhaps heavy and fierce fighting was in store for the force, for these pirates of the river had had their quarters there, father and son, for more than a generation, and would not be likely to yield them without a struggle. Then, again, they would be ashore, behind stockades, and would have the advantage of knowing every inch of the river, while the attackers would have to come up in the open, exposed to every gun and rifle. But if the enemy counted upon the fact that the British tars would be dismayed at the thought, they were doomed to disappointment, for all that the latter did was to joke and laugh, with an occasional grumble at the long pull which must intervene between themselves and the enemy.

"Well, there's one thing about the business that I like," cried one of them as he pulled at his oar. "A long pull's a long pull, and yer can't alter it nohow, but yer can have it made easy like if the flood's with yer. That's what we've got, and yer can feel the rush at every stroke. With a stream like this we'll be there against to-morrow night."

"And then the guns'll be popping," burst in another.

"Bet yer a quid o' 'bacca I'm in their show afore you, Billie."

"Done with yer," was the answer, growled in the huskiest of voices. "It's a fair bet, and our mates'll see who's the winner."

Laughing and chatting as they rowed, the hours swiftly passed away, Tyler having much to occupy his attention. Indeed, every bend of the river brought some recollection to his mind. It was there that they had hidden their prahu, that low sandy bank was the spot where they had landed in search of inhabitants, while, higher up, the land became even more familiar.

"That is the rock which Li Sung and I defended," he ventured to remark, when at last the expedition was close to the branch of the river upon which Rembas was situated, "and by turning to the left now we should be under their guns before we could believe it."

"Then we will keep straight on," was the reply. "But that was a capital site for defence, Mr. Richardson. For two alone it was just the isolated position which would offer a chance of success, and you were fortunate to have it so close at hand when you were capsized. But that reminds me of the bore. We will look out for a spot in which to pass the night."

When darkness fell the boats of the expedition lay snugly under the banks, while the men lay in them, smoking and waiting for the meal. Then fires were lighted and kettles set to boil, while certain of the men were told off to act as sentries. And thus, pulling cautiously by day, and tying up to the banks at night, the winding course of the river was slowly followed and Paddi approached. At length the latter was close at hand, and one fine morning, after the bore had gone sweeping past on its course, with its usual accompaniment of brushwood and drift from the banks of the stream, the expedition loaded weapons, and, pulling up their moorings, took the flood which went racing on to Paddi. Had they

wished to go slow to their destination it would have been almost impossible, so strong and rapid was the stream in these upper reaches. But the pace suited the spirit of every man, and particularly of those who occupied the gig. At the helm, sitting in his shirt sleeves, was the Rajah of Sarawak, as calm as if before his own home at Sarawak, while close at hand were Captain Keppel and Tyler. Forward of them were the crew, a set of lusty fellows, whose hands itched to toss their oars aside and snatch at the cutlass which each carried in his belt. Hark! A murmur in front, a bend in the river, and nothing but trees and jungle to be seen. Was it the enemy? The commander turned his face towards his companion questioningly, and in reply Tyler nodded.

"We are close on them," he said in calm tones. "I remember that there is a hill on the left, some little distance from the main stockade, and that it has a fort on top. That is where the noise comes from."

"And here we are in sight," exclaimed the Rajah. "Now we can prepare for a peppering with slugs. But we are a bad mark to aim at, for the stream is sweeping us on at a pace. Keep a sharp look-out, for it is about here that we shall run upon a boom, and it would be bad for us if we became entangled. They will have the range to a nicety, you may be sure, and they would blow us out of the water."

The warning was given in the calmest of tones, for the Rajah was no alarmist, but a man of great courage and a tried soldier. Gripping his helm he steered the gig up the very centre of the stream, and as he reached the bend ahead shot her over to the farther side.

"There may be skulkers lying on the edge of the bank," he remarked, "and they would have us within easy range. Ah, listen to that!"

So swift was the current that the banks seemed to leap past them, and long before those aboard had time to consider what was about to happen, or realize the fact that they were practically alone, a wide interval separating them from the other

boats and the main part of the expedition, the gig had swung round the bend and was in full sight of the enemy. A thousand of them, or thereabouts, lined the hill, and set up a yell of defiance which caused even the boldest of the attackers to change colour. Rushing hither and thither, and filling the air with their cries, the pirates watched the gig advance, while some of their comrades, as if to add to the note of defiance already sent up, danced a mad war-fling on the roof of the fort erected on the summit of the hill.

"Number one," said the captain coolly, emptying one of the barrels of his gun at the multitude. "But those are not the fellows we have to deal with just now. We are for the main stockade."

"And there it is, sir," shouted Tyler, as he came into view of the bamboo palisading which surrounded Paddi. "There is the main fort, sir, and in front of it is the boom. It is a different one from that which was here some days ago, and I think that it has been constructed more strongly."

"It is composed of trees driven into the bed of the river," said the rajah, taking a hurried look. "Others are laid across the top and lashed there with rattans. We must cut them adrift."

"Wait, there is an opening," called out Captain Keppel, standing up in the gig and pointing ahead. "Yes, I am sure of it, but it is very narrow. Send her at it, Rajah. Put her nose full tilt at the opening and squeeze her through."

In their excitement not one of the crew of the gig recollected the fact that they were still practically alone, and that to pierce the boom and enter on the farther side would expose them to the attack of every one of the enemy. Swept on by the river, which matched well with their eagerness, they turned the head of the gig for the narrow opening in the boom, and went at it with a will. Bump! It was hardly wide enough, and the timbers grated against the trees. But nothing could stop her, and in an instant she was through the

narrow neck and shooting on towards the stockade beyond, and the shelving hill, on the foot of which John Marshall and his party of natives had remained while Tyler entered in search of the prisoners.

"'Bout ship!" called out the captain. "Nicely does it, my lads. Now, keep her there while I give 'em a barrel or two. Mr. Richardson, you had better join me."

Obeying the order without hesitation, the gig was turned swiftly, and by means of the paddles was prevented from drifting down upon the stockade, where she and her crew would undoubtedly have fallen victims to the pirates, for they would have been overwhelmed. Then, with a steadiness which did them credit, the commander, Tyler, and the coxswain raised their weapons to their shoulders and opened a fusillade.

Crash! Bang! A roar and a couple of thunderous reports; then a spurt of flame and smoke from the embrasures along the face of the fort.

"Aimed for the boom, and easily missed us," said the rajah with a smile, as the discharge swept over the gig and churned the water about the boom into foam. "But a few of the bullets are dropping about us, so we'll move aside. Steady there, starboard! Strongly does it with the port. There she is, and soon our comrades will be here."

By now a warm musketry fire had commenced upon the gig, and the bullets were splashing on every side. But not a man flinched from his task. Indeed the tars who manned the oars scorned even to turn their heads, for they were steady old salts, and had been in many a scuffle. Instead, they kept their eyes on their companions, and watched as the remaining boats came down upon the boom. Swept by the current the pinnace struck it broadside on, and was held there for a moment, receiving several bullets amongst her crew, three of whom were wounded. But others soon came to her assistance, and with the help of the natives the rattans were cut through and the boom dragged aside. Then the twelve-

pounder answered the boom of the brass cannon set up in the stockade, and a burst of grape went shrieking and hurtling through the town of Paddi.

Meanwhile the gig had slowly and insensibly approached the bank below the stockade, and, thinking to take her easily, the pirates dashed down to the water's edge, where they rushed to and fro, almost delirious with excitement, while they discharged their guns at the crew. Suddenly a figure pushed to their front, and Tyler, who had kept a watchful eye upon them, instantly recognized the Dutchman. So short was the distance which separated them that each recognized the other, and at once a weapon flew to the Dutchman's shoulder and he fired, the bullet striking the gunwale of the boat close beside Tyler. A moment later Captain Keppel pressed his trigger, a Malay beside the Dutchman falling full length to the ground.

"A bad shot!" he cried in disgust. "Give me your rifle, and I will see whether I cannot bag the fellow for you, for I recognize him as the notorious Hans Schlott."

Reaching for Tyler's weapon, he swung it to his shoulder and would have fired had not the Dutchman leapt aside and darted amongst his men. Indeed the knowledge that Tyler was there amongst the attackers seemed suddenly to have caused him to lose his nerve, for as they stared, hoping to catch a good view of him, they saw his figure pushing through the throng of frantic natives, and presently he was at the entrance to the stockade.

"Halt!" shouted Tyler, standing in his excitement and at once becoming the target for a hundred rifles. "Hans Schlott, I call upon you to stop and hand yourself over to justice! Move a step forward and I will shoot you like a dog!"

As he spoke he stretched out his hand and took his rifle from Captain Keppel. Then, raising it to his shoulder, he covered the Dutchman and waited for his answer. Had he been an older man, and one more full of wariness, no doubt he would have fired then and there and ended the matter.

But Tyler hesitated, and the moment gave Hans Schlott his liberty. At the sound of Tyler's voice he stopped abruptly and swung round, displaying features which were livid with terror. His lips moved as if he were repeating the order and the warning. Then, as the thought of flight occurred to him, he suddenly threw himself upon the ground, and, diving forward, was behind the bamboo barricade before the shot could reach him. Then, with terror written upon his face and the fear of death in his heart, he leapt to his feet and went scampering away through the town and out into the jungle. As for Tyler, seeing that he had missed his mark, he rapidly reloaded, determined to capture his man when the stockade was taken.

"Ah! here are some of the boats, so we will pull for the bank," shouted Captain Keppel a moment later. "Give way, my lads, and do not let it be said that we were the last to set foot in the enemy's fort."

With a cheer the crew of the gig bent to their oars, and, helped by the tide, soon brought the boat up to the bank. A second earlier one of the cutters had reached the same part, and instantly her commander, a Mr. D'Aeth, led a charge up the slope against the bamboo stockade. Leaping into the water, Tyler was only a few paces behind him, and, accompanied by a collection of sailors and marines, dashed at the stockade. Behind them, racing for the same goal as soon as their boats deposited them upon the bank, came more of the men of the *Dido*, and amongst them Dyaks and natives of Borneo. Here and there shots rang out in the air, and shrill cries resounded. Then a sheet of flame suddenly licked round the central hut, and almost before it could have been thought possible Paddi was burning to the ground, while the host of warriors who had manned the stockade, and who in their time had wrought such misery, were fleeing for their lives, with a score and more of hungry Dyaks at their heels, who longed for this opportunity of revenge, and for the heads which victory might bring.

"And now for the other fellows, and then we will follow up the river," said Captain Keppel. "You will naturally want to go in pursuit, Mr. Richardson, and therefore you will at once report to Mr. Horton. Ask him to take you in his own boat, and tell him, with my compliments, that he is to do all that is possible to capture the rogue who led these pirates. Now, to the gig, my lads, and let us clear the neighbourhood!"

Filled with exultation at the success which had attended their efforts, and at the thought that they had suffered little loss, the sailors and marines soon sent the remainder of the enemy flying, and then prepared to follow them with a readiness which showed that their hearts were in the matter. Dividing into two parties, one at once set to work to dismantle the forts and toss the guns into the river, while the other boarded the pinnace, and with the Rajah for company, and Lieutenant Horton in command, ascended the tributary which entered the river Sarebus on the right of the spit of land upon which Paddi had been built. A short pull, however, disclosed the fact that it was too shallow for navigation, even with boats drawing so little water. The expedition returned, therefore, and, having rested and eaten, pulled for the tributary on the left, the very one along which Tyler and his natives had approached the piratical stronghold.

"They will wait for us higher up, and will make a stand there," said the Rajah. "If we can come up with them during the day we shall be able to scatter them, for they are thoroughly upset at our success, and only want a little more to persuade them that they are beaten. Then they will come in and ask for terms. But you will have to be careful, Mr. Horton, for the river is very narrow, and you may be certain that hundreds of eyes are watching us from the jungle. We must never give them an opportunity of rushing us."

Carefully keeping his pinnace in the centre of the stream, the lieutenant placed himself between the Rajah and Tyler, for he knew that both had had experience of the pirates, and

was anxious to be in reach of advice. Then, with the tars pulling with all their might, and the marines with loaded weapons in readiness for instant action, he steered his craft so as to avoid all obstacles. Presently there was the sound of gongs from the jungle, and ere long hundreds of the enemy were to be seen.

"They are in force," said the Rajah, "that is evident, and I fancy that we shall have some difficulty in ferreting them out. Listen to the fellows! Why, they make even more noise than before."

That the natives were aroused was very evident, for as the pinnace came within sight of the thick jungle which they had selected for defence, the crash of gongs and war-drums became deafening, while shrill cries of anger and defiance filled the air.

"Just let them see that we can make a noise too," sang out the lieutenant cheerily. "Steady there, my lads! Hang on your oars while we get the gun ranged! You can fire when you are ready, gunner."

"Ay, ay, sir. Grape, or shall I give the varmint a ball?"

"The first, please, and send it well amongst them."

"You can trust me for that, sir. I've waited for this here day for a year back, and bust me—"

The remainder of his conversation became inaudible as he turned to the twelve-pounder and began to adjust the sights; but that he was in earnest was clear, for he paid particular attention to the levelling of the weapon, taking so much time that those who were looking on could almost have struck him, so greatly was their patience tried. But now all was in readiness, and with a glance at his commander the gunner of the pinnace sent the contents of his weapon splattering into the forest. At once a deafening babel of shouts and shrieks arose, while a hail of slugs, leaden pellets, and pieces of iron and stone came swishing in the direction of the pinnace.

"Marines to watch and pick off their men. Pull, my lads, and let us give them the cold steel," sang out the lieutenant,

standing in his place to watch the enemy. "Now, all together, send her ahead."

There was no confusion on the pinnace, thanks to the fact that all had been previously arranged, and to the discipline which existed. In a moment the bows were pointing for the bank, and hardly had the keel grated, and the twelve-pounder again spoken out, than more than half of those aboard sprang ashore. Seizing cutlasses, they waited only to allow their officers to take post in advance, when they went pell-mell for the enemy.

"Keep together, lads, and be sure that you do not separate from your comrades," shouted the lieutenant, for the jungle was extremely dense, and to have rushed into its midst without any caution would certainly have led to death. But the men who composed the expedition were hardened to warfare and were perfectly steady. By no means lacking the necessary dash, they, for all that, held themselves together, and, without losing their heads in the excitement of the moment, obeyed their officers to the full. Bearing to the left, where a number of the enemy were located, the gallant little band threw itself upon them, cutlasses and revolvers meeting kriss and knife, while overhead flew spears thrown by the Dyaks.

"Charge!" shrieked Lieutenant Horton as they came to close quarters. "Beat them back and then prepare to retreat."

Without glancing back at his men, for he knew well enough that he would not be allowed to attack alone, he rushed at the nearest pirate, and, fending a swishing blow aimed at him with a kriss, cut the man down with his sword. The Rajah was beside him, and he too was confronted by a formidable pirate. But there was no standing against him, for this Rajah was the Englishman whose name was known and feared far and wide, and who had shown that he was as good in the fight as he was in ordering the affairs of the people of Sarawak. An arm shot from his shoulder, and the fist lit full upon the face of the nearest pirate, while a shot from his revolver sent a second sprawling to the ground. A third at once took to

his heels, an example which his comrades instantly followed. As for Tyler, a busy three minutes was before him. Running beside the Rajah and the lieutenant, he had at once become engaged with the enemy, and had shot down a man with his weapon. Then in the background he once again caught sight of the familiar, bulky figure of the Dutchman, and, instantly forgetting the caution which had been given, he rushed forward, hoping to capture him.

"The murderer!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "After him!"

Forgetful of the danger he would incur, and of the fact that he was disobeying an order, he plunged forward and snatched at the collar of Hanns Schlott, while he held a revolver to his ear. A second later he was hurled aside by a Dyak who happened to be close beside his rascally leader, and hardly had he reached the earth than his opponent was standing over him, about to bury a murderous-looking kriss in his body.

"Fire!" shouted a voice some few yards away, and instantly, as if the order had been meant for him, Tyler pressed a trigger and brought his opponent stumbling upon his face.

"And now for Hanns Schlott," he called out, springing to his feet and looking about him. "Where is he? Surely he has not escaped."

"He has, sure enough," was the reply, in the well-known voice of John Marshall. "This kind of thing is too much for a chap like him. But we'd better be going, sir, for our chaps are retiring, and we ought never to have come so far."

That the advice was good was certain, and turning at once the two ran back to the main party, a shower of spears and a few bullets following them. Then the order was given to make for the pinnace, and very shortly all were aboard, staring into the jungle, while the twelve-pounder broke the silence with its boom.

"Looks as though we were surrounded," said the Rajah, turning his head. "Shots are coming from the jungle on

either side, and from ahead also. Then I can see numbers of the enemy behind."

"Then we had better see how we are to get out of the muddle," replied the lieutenant coolly. "Ah, there's the spot for us! Over with the tiller there, and head her for that little bay."

He pointed to a portion of the bank where there was a bend, and where in the course of many years the earth had been washed away till quite a little bay had been formed, with a perpendicular bank. And into this the pinnace and the few native boats which also formed part of the expedition were rowed.

"Marines to remain in the pinnace and keep up a musketry fire," cried the lieutenant in the calmest tones. "Men of the *Dido* to climb the bank and take up position there."

In a moment the tars were over the side, wading through the shallow water, and ere long had scrambled to the level of the jungle.

"A few minutes with their cutlasses would be a good thing, I think," the Rajah ventured to suggest. "I know these pirates well, and if you leave them cover through which to crawl they will be a constant danger and annoyance."

"Quite so, and many thanks, Rajah! I had not thought of that. Now, lads," continued the lieutenant, "all lie down and get your muskets ready. Mr. Richardson, take a party of twelve forward, and cut down the reeds and grass within thirty yards."

It seemed quite natural to Tyler to touch his cap and answer "Ay, ay, sir," and then, picking his men haphazard, he went to carry out the order. When that was done, the marines and sailors lay down flat upon the ground, firing now and again, but only when a figure showed itself. And round about them every tree hid an enemy, while the jungle was alive with the voices of the pirates, and the incessant jangle of gongs and the beat of war-drums. Spears flashed in the sunlight, cast by hands which could not be seen, while a shower

of darts and arrows hissed through the air and struck the ground within a few inches of the defenders. And, drowning every other sound, the twelve-pounder every now and again spoke out, as it sent a charge of grape amidst the pirates.

When darkness came it found Tyler and his friends in sorry plight, surrounded by enemies, and deafened by the clamour which came from every quarter of the jungle.

CHAPTER XX

The End of the Chase

AHOY there! Horton, ahoy! Where are you, Rajah?" Strangely weird and uncanny did the sounds appear as they left the lips of Captain Keppel and floated across the rushing stream away into the jungle. "Ahoy! Ahoy!"

Three times in succession did the gallant commander give tongue to the words as he sat in his gig with his gun across his knees. Then, hearing the beat of gongs and of drums, and the shouts of the combatants, and detecting no voice which he could recognize as coming from his junior or from the Rajah of Sarawak, he lifted his weapon and fired it in the direction from which the loudest sounds came.

"Ahoy!" back came the answering shout, but almost drowned by the noise of shallow water rushing over a pebbly bottom. "Ahoy there! Don't fire or you will hit one of us. We are dead ahead of you."

"Then we will join you," called out the captain, and at once his gig, in which he had set out to relieve or help the forward party immediately prolonged firing had been heard, was rowed towards the bay in which the native craft lay, and just outside which the pinnace was moored, so as to allow her to make use of her gun.

Weird indeed, and hazardous in the extreme, was the position in which the British lay, and as he reclined upon the grass, with the Rajah on one side of him and John Marshall on the other, Tyler had to confess that never before had he been in a worse predicament.

"We were in a tight place when upon the schooner," he

whispered to his companion, the boatswain, "and that rock, where Li Sung and I were caught and surrounded was a ticklish position, but here there is no knowing where the enemy are. They are everywhere, and bullets and spears come from every direction. Halloo! There's a shot, and that is Captain Keppel's voice or I am much mistaken."

A few seconds later the crew of the gig joined hands with Lieutenant Horton's party, and a council of war was held, the Rajah joining in, together with Tyler.

"Come," said Captain Keppel in pleasant tones, "we of the navy do not pretend to know everything, and there is no doubt that in a case like this, when the lives of all our men are at stake, the best advice should be taken. You have had experience with these people, Rajah, and so have you, young Richardson. What shall we do? For my part I fancy that it will take us all our time to keep the enemy from rushing in upon us."

"I cannot see that we can do otherwise than remain here and do our best," was the emphatic answer, "for if we attempt to retire we may very well get into greater difficulties, and besides, it is a bad thing to give way before these fellows."

"Not to be thought of," burst in the captain with energy. "Either we remain, or we go forward."

"Why not scatter the men a little, keeping them sufficiently close to allow them to regain the centre with ease, and yet so far apart as to extend their radius of fire?" asked Tyler as the commander of the *Dido* turned to him. "Then if the men were instructed only to discharge their muskets when they actually saw one of the enemy, the latter might think that we were retiring, and might be induced to show up a little more. In that case we should give them a lesson."

"Capital! The lad has a head for these situations," exclaimed Captain Keppel. "We will do as he suggests and see what happens. As we have heard very truly, we are running the danger here of being rushed and of being slowly picked

off, while the enemy are never seen. Let us entice them forward and then give them a few volleys. Come, I will take post on the left, and, Mr. Richardson, oblige me by going to the right. Rajah, will you come with me? while our lieutenant takes the post of honour in the centre."

The matter was arranged without further delay, and very shortly the movement had been carried out in absolute silence. With John Marshall beside him, Tyler crept into the jungle on the right, and, holding close to the bank of the river, pushed on till the voices of some of the enemy were close at hand.

Then, selecting a wooded part, before which the ground was more than usually open, he lay at full length and waited for some of the pirates to appear.

"Uncanny work," he whispered in his companion's ear. "I would far rather feel that the others were close at hand; but I suggested the movement and must carry my part of it through. Keep a bright look-out, and on no account fire unless I give the order."

Spread like a fan round the edge of the little bay, the sailors and marines took up their positions in couples, for even the boldest of men are apt to take fright when sent out into an unknown part in the darkness, and with enemies close at hand. Then silence came over the British force, and even the twelve-pounder, which had at intervals deafened all those within reach, and drowned the babel of the enemy, ceased its clamour. In silence, with locks at full cock and pieces at their shoulders, the men of the expedition waited; and as they lay there the deep and sonorous tones of hundreds of gongs came to an end also, and the war-drums remained unbeaten. Even the shouts and the babel of voices died down, and presently the jungle was at peace.

"One would imagine that we were alone," whispered Tyler. "But you may be sure that every tree hides some dark figure, and that away behind, out of hearing of ourselves, those who are leading the enemy are talking the matter over. Look

over there. There are lights, and there is the sound of an axe."

He pointed to the right, up-stream, some fifty yards away, and both saw three dark figures standing close beside the water, holding torches above their heads. With them were some twenty others, who were attacking the trunks of the trees which grew on the edge of the bank, evidently with the object of causing them to fall across the stream.

"They want to keep us from going farther, which makes it look as though they had taken their women and children and their wealth to some spot up this tributary," said Tyler in low tones. "It will take them a little time to get through those trunks, so that we can leave them to it for the present. But later on we shall have to fire at them and drive them away. I wonder whether they will do the same down-stream, and so bar our retreat should we have cause to fly?"

The question was one which could not fail to cause him anxiety, for then the safety of all in the expedition would be jeopardized. But he had little time to think about it, for scarcely had his attention again returned to the jungle in front of him when some dozen dusky figures appeared, creeping across the open space which separated them from the bank. Instantly the muskets covered them, fingers went to the triggers, while heads sank down to the right till the eye could glance along the sights. But so deep was the gloom that that was impossible; so that those who were defending the position could only point their weapons where they thought the enemy were, in the hope of hitting them.

"Fire!" In stentorian tones the command came from the captain of the *Dido*, and at once a volley burst from the waiting men, causing the enemy to come to a halt, and then take to their heels with shrill cries of terror. Then once more the shouting and the incessant beat of gongs was heard, while the jungle became alive with moving figures, who fired at their foes and sent spears and arrows swishing in their direction.

"Now for the others," said Tyler, noticing that those who were engaged in cutting the trees were still at their work. "Ready? Then let them have a bullet."

Both fired together, while, ere the report of their rifles had died down, the boom of the twelve-pounder was heard, and a mass of grape went crashing in amongst the trees.

"That will be their last effort," said Tyler. "They must have lost heavily during the night, and seeing that we are not intending to retire they will begin to feel hopeless. To-morrow, when we start to ascend the river, they will feel that their cause is ruined."

And this proved to be the case. Lying or squatting upon the edge of the bank, the British force spent the long hours of darkness in keeping watch and in firing occasionally into the trees. Morning found them worn out with their exertions, and some of them actually asleep in spite of the danger. But a call from their leader soon brought them to their feet, and at once they prepared to embark.

"Get aboard, and smartly, my lads," he called out in cheery tones. "We have shown those fellows that we are not to be easily driven off, and now that the morning has come we will let them see that we have plenty of life left in us. Aboard, all of you, and let us hurry, for I am hungry, and until the matter is ended we shall be unable to breakfast."

The words brought a cheer and a shout of merriment from the sailors and marines, and all at once leapt to obey him. Soon the pinnace was manned, and with the gunner at his piece, and the marines with weapons ready, began to push up the river, followed by the gig in which sat Captain Keppel. Hardly had they rowed fifty yards when a man appeared with a white flag, and very soon the Rajah of Sarawak was engaged in conversation with him.

"Their women and children and all their possessions are up the stream," he said, when he had questioned the Malay, "and so they wish to lay down their arms on any terms, but with the hope that we will spare those who are helpless."

"Where is their leader?" asked the commander of the *Dido*. "They must hand him over to me immediately, for he is a murderer, and I have more interest in capturing the fellow than in taking hundreds of these natives."

"They say that that is impossible," was the Rajah's answer, when he had again spoken with the Malay who bore the white flag. "Hanns Schlott, the murderer, bolted early in the night, and has not been seen since."

"Then they must provide trackers and a force to go in search," said Captain Keppel without hesitation. "Mr. Richardson, you will take half a dozen men and go in command, for I will not deprive you of a task which belongs to you by rights. Get your breakfast at once, and set out as soon as you can. Now, Rajah, we will discuss this matter in full, and then I fancy that you, like myself, will be glad of something to eat."

At a shout from the Malay several of the head men amongst the pirates came forward, and entered into conversation with the great white man of whom all had heard. Thanks to the fact that the Rajah spoke the language like a native of Borneo the negotiations were soon completed, and in less than half an hour it had been arranged that a final meeting should take place in the afternoon, when the terms to be granted should be published. When that hour arrived, the chiefs came forward once more, looking dejected and down at heart, and sat down in a circle about the Rajah. Great was their surprise and delight when they were told that only hostages would be required for their good behaviour, and that they were to abstain from piracy, or their country would be again invaded. Beyond that there was no punishment, but they were urgently advised to take to trade and live at peace with their neighbours.

As for Tyler, he was delighted with the permission given him, and with the thought that the capture of the murderer was to be left to him entirely. Hastily gulping down a breakfast, he took his place at the head of the six men whom he

had selected, and at once called for the natives who were to lead the party. Then he plunged into the jungle in their wake, for all the world as if these guides were the Dyaks whom he had met farther along the coast, and they were making their way to Sarawak.

"Dutchman here," said one of the trackers suddenly, coming to a halt and pointing eagerly at the ground. "Here," he said, making use of the small stock of English which he possessed. "Follow, and we catch."

Like hounds let loose upon the trail the party of Malays and Dyaks who were leading plunged through the jungle, taxing the strength of Tyler and his men to the full. For an hour they kept on without a halt, and just as Tyler was about to call to them and beg of them to stop for a time, their leader threw his arms into the air, and spread them out, as a signal to all that he had made a discovery.

"Come along here," he said, pointing with his finger to the trail left by the Dutchman as he fled. "Him big and heavy, and him sit there. See?"

Tyler glanced at the spot, and at once grasped the fact that Hanns Schlott had rested himself upon the root of a tree. But he could not tell that which was clear to the native.

"Him have gun," said the latter positively. "Him sit and point into tree. Then him let gun drop beside him. There are the marks."

As if he had actually witnessed the act, the man pointed to some scratches upon the bark where the lock of the gun must have struck. Then he led Tyler a few paces ahead, drawing his attention to the trail as he did so.

"Him silly," he said with a disdainful smile for the memory of his old leader. "Ever since he take the boat from the Englishman and kill the owner, him so silly. Him frightened at him own shadow. See here. He start and turn round at every step. Him stop and raise the rifle. Him fire. Look!"

The eagle glance of this pirate allowed nothing to escape him, and as he spoke he drew Tyler's attention to various spots. Before them ran the trail, still freshly shown by the trampled grass and reed. And as the tracker had said, it came to a stop here and there, while a small patch was more trodden than the other. Here it was that Hanns Schlott, the cowardly Dutchman, and the villain who had murdered Mr. Beverley, had halted to stare about him. His conscience perhaps disturbed him. Or he imagined that he heard a sound, or saw a figure. Fear of capture and of death unnerved him, and, giving credence to his imagination, he peered amidst the jungle, and then fired his piece at some shadow. Yes, that was what had happened, for Tyler could see with his own eyes the huge patch where the shot had struck a tree close at hand and ripped the bark from it.

"We shall have to be careful," he said, "or this fellow will be shooting us as we come up with him. He is a desperate man, and will stop at nothing."

"Looks as if he was daft," burst in John Marshall. "Seems to me as if the trouble had turned his head. But the fellow's beckoning, sir. He wants us to go ahead."

"He not far away. Soon find the Dutchman," said the Malay, dragging his kriss from his pocket. "Shall he be killed, or taken a prisoner?"

"The last," was Tyler's answer, "for he has a crime to answer for. Come, push ahead and let us capture him."

Once more the party of natives and Englishmen took up the trail, and a mile farther on were rewarded by the sound of a rifle-shot which suddenly rang out in the jungle. Instantly they redoubled their pace, and did not halt till the leading Malay again threw his arms into the air and motioned to them to do so. A moment or two later their eyes fell upon the figure of Hanns Schlott. But what a change! Once a burly individual, with enormous, unwieldy limbs and rounded cheeks, he was now a haggard man. True, the time had been too short to allow of much change in his weight or in his

general appearance; but it was the Dutchman's face and eyes which attracted attention, while the droop of his head, the stoop of his broad shoulders, added to the change which could be observed. No longer was he the leader of a band of pirates whose ill fame had spread far and wide, and who committed any sort of atrocity with impunity. He was a criminal escaping from the law, and every shadow, each tree and bush, contained one of the pursuers. That young Englishman who had been aboard the schooner when the murder of Mr. Beverley was carried out was forever in his memory, and each object which his imagination conjured into human shape was Tyler's figure. Our hero's name was forever on his lips, and each shot from his smoking rifle was meant to pierce his body.

"That killed him! I saw the bullet strike on his body and perforate," the Dutchman was shouting as Tyler and his friends came up with the fugitive.

"Ha, ha, ha! At last I have paid off the score. He said he would follow me and hang me, and instead I drove him ashore. Then he went to Paddi and robbed us of our prahus. For that my shot has paid. And now to give him what is due, to return in full the trouble which he has caused me. I will go within an inch of him, and will place the muzzle against his ear. Then I shall be free."

As he spoke Hanns Schlott glared at one portion of the jungle, with eyes which seemed to protrude from their sockets and to be capable of seeing nothing else. Then he grasped his rifle with feverish hands, and in spite of the fact that it was still hot rammed a charge in. Then another thought came to his tortured mind, and he clutched his head in despair.

"Beaten!" he shouted in high-pitched tones. "Even then I am not sure of my life, for there is another. The beggarly sailor, John Marshall they called him, knew of the deed. He saw it, and swore, too, that he would follow me to the end of the world. Of what use to struggle further?"

He paused in the process of ramming down a charge, and attempted to consider the question. But his wits had gone astray, and, unable to grasp the matter, his mind again turned to Tyler.

"What!" he screamed, suddenly facing about, and pointing at another part of the jungle. "He is still alive and laughs at me. Ha!"

His face was like a demon's as, gun in hand, he crept stealthily towards the spot in which he fancied his victim was hidden. The lips twitched and were withdrawn from the teeth. The pallid cheeks hung loosely and quivered, while the eyes blazed with the intensity of the madness which filled him. Falling upon his hands and knees, he crawled softly across the leaves and twigs as if anxious not to disturb his enemy. Then once more the rifle came to his shoulder. There was a pause ere the trigger was pressed, and then another report startled the jungle. Ere the echoes had died down the madman had sprung forward and hurled himself upon a twisted tree which he had imagined to be his victim.

It was a terrible sight to look upon, and filled Tyler and his little party with horror; for never before had it been their lot to watch the ravings of a madman bereft of his senses through fear of the consequences of his crime. It was horrible to watch, and our hero at once decided to put a stop to it.

"His weapon is empty now," he whispered to his men, "and therefore we will capture him. Separate at once and get into position. When you are ready I will give the word, and we will make a rush. Quick! for I see that he is sitting down and getting ready to ram down another charge."

Realizing the importance of haste in the matter, the tars rapidly scattered, and ere long had formed a cordon about the madman. Then, at a shout from Tyler they threw themselves upon him and made him their prisoner. His weapon was taken from him and his arms bound, for he was frantic with rage. Then the murderer, who had already suffered much for his crime, was led back through the forest, and in the course

of time found his way to Singapore. But no gallows waited for him, for another form of punishment was to be his. An asylum for criminal lunatics became his home, where for years he dragged out a terrible existence. As for Tyler, satisfied at the thought that he had done what was right in the matter, he reported his arrival to his commander and waited for further orders. Nor had he long to wait, for once Paddi had been destroyed, and the pirates defeated, the expedition turned its attention to Pakoo, which was easily captured. Then came the turn of Rembas, where severe resistance was met with. But the British were not to be turned back, and in spite of the hot fire directed against them, and the numbers of the enemy, they pushed forward and took the place. Then, feeling that they had done all that was possible, they returned to Sarawak with the knowledge that a scourge had been put down, and that something more had been done to bring about the peace for which the Rajah of Sarawak strove.

For Tyler there was little merry-making, for a bullet had struck him in the elbow as he charged against the stockade at Rembas, and that same evening he had lain in an open boat, with teeth fast set, while the surgeons amputated the limb. But he had gone through so much already that this was not likely to disturb him very much. Indeed, within a month he was up and about, and ere long back at his duty.

Years have passed since then, and the lad who went down into the hold of the grain ship alone to rescue the unconscious officers, and who afterwards led a tribe of Dyaks in far-away Borneo, is an old man, who steps with far less agility than in those young days. But the old spirit is there. The white beard and moustache, with their decidedly nautical cut, cannot disguise the square chin and the firm lips. The eyes sparkle as of yore, and return a glance without flinching, while even now there is a swing in the shoulders, a poise of the head, which distinguishes Tyler. Yes, in spite of the loss of an arm, he has led a life of activity, and has only recently settled down to enjoy the remainder of his allotted years peacefully and in

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